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Vol. I

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FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS STEAM WONDER. By "NONAME."



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FRANK READE, JR.,

AND

HIS STEAM WONDER.

By "NONAME,"

Author of all the Frank Reade Stories.

CHAPTER I.

FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS FATHER—THE WONDERFUL INVENTION.

"Now, father, I want you to come and look at it. I think I've got everything right now."

"In a moment, my boy as soon as I get a light for my cigar."

"Here's a match, father."

"Ah! that's handy; there."

The cigar lit, the father and son passed out of the house—the residence of a well-known wealthy gentleman in the Far West—and went through the back yard toward a large carriage-house in the rear of the premises.

"I should think it was about time you had it right, my boy," said the father, puffing away at his cigar. "You have been thinking at it for over a year."

"So I have, father; but that was no worse than *your* first experiment, you know," replied the son, a manly-looking youth of seventeen summers and the same number of winters.

"You are right; but I had no precedents, and you had."

"True; but mine is a bigger thing than yours was," and the son led the way into the carriage-house. "Just look at that, now."

"It's a beauty, so far as appearances go," said his father, his face beaming with pride and gratification; "but will it *work*? That's the point you want to arrive at."

"Oh, it works like a charm," replied the son. "Every part is perfect. Every joint is covered and protected from the dust."

"But can it adapt itself to any little rise or depression on the earth's surface?"

"Oh, yes. I've had an eye to that all the time. It doesn't make much noise, either, even at full speed."

"I would like to see it on trial once, my boy," said the father. "If it will do all you claim for it, you have a fortune in your hands, for it will work a revolution in this section."

"I will get up steam, father, while you examine the machinery," and the young man proceeded to follow his suggestion, throwing off his coat and mounting the machine under inspection.

And now, reader, who do you suppose the father and son are?

No reader of the BOYS OF NEW YORK has forgotten Frank Reade. He well remembers the great genius that invented the world-renowned *Steam Man* of the plains, the *Steam Team*, and the *Steam Tally-Ho*.

Well, Frank Reade, after making an ample fortune out of his invention, married the girl of his choice, bought a large tract of plain-land out West, settled down to farming by steam, and soon had a thriving settlement around him. He plowed by steam, hauled up his grain by steam—in fact, made steam do the work of man and beast to such an extent as to astound all his neighbors. He used one-fourth only of the force his neighbors did, and thus made four times as much money.

He had several children in the course of time. The eldest, Frank Reade, Jr., now a youth of seventeen, at the opening of our story, inherited his father's inventive genius and great fondness for adventure.

On his return from college, Frank had commenced experimenting on a steam traveling conveyance for the illimitable plains of the West

which he had conceived while at school. His father, willing to encourage and develop a taste for a science that had made him both rich and famous, allowed him to draw on him for all the money he needed in perfecting his plans.

Frank took possession of the farm carpenter-shop, and employed a first-class model-maker to work under his supervision. He had many of the tools and implements his father had used years ago, as well as the great knowledge which Frank Reade, Sr., placed at his service.

After nearly a year of unremitting toil, Frank had everything complete from the hands of his model-maker. He sent the model to Chicago, and had one of the best machine-shops in that great city make a duplicate of it in steel and hard wood. When complete, this duplicate had been sent to him by rail, and he had put it together before calling on his father to inspect it.

And now, reader, let us see what his wonderful invention was.

I don't know that I can give the reader a better idea of its use than by the simple statement that it was an engine and car without a railroad! Indeed, it needed no track. It was made to leave tracks *behind it*—not follow one—and to give the horse a rest.

The engine was a beauty—a picture to look at. It was light and airy in appearance, yet strong as the best steel and wrought iron could make it.

At first glance it had the appearance of an ordinary railroad engine. But a closer inspection would show a vast difference.

In the first place, what is the boiler in the ordinary engine was simply a case that inclosed the delicate machinery to protect it from dust. The boiler, a small upright one, was at the end that connected with the car. Steam was to be generated by the use of a non-explosive oil. A special and very peculiar furnace was constructed for its use, giving an intense heat without making any smoke. The smoke-stack at the forward end was for ornament rather than use. All the machinery was inclosed in a round sheet-iron case, between the boiler and the smoke-stack, and was concealed from view.

This curious engine had four wheels. Two tall driving wheels supported the main weight of the engine. The shaft that turned them was connected with the axle in the center between them. The spokes were small rods of polished steel. The tires were six inches wide, with curved cogs or claws, six inches apart, to prevent slipping on the ground. Then, on the inner side were flanges as deep as the cogs, to prevent jolting when running on a hard surface.

The forward wheels had claws and flanges also, a foot less in diameter, and were on a pivot. A steel rod connected them with the engineer's seat. By means of that rod he could guide the course of the engine. There were other rods to enable him to regulate the speed and move backward or forward.

On either side of the engine, in large gilt letters, the name of this curious invention was affixed.

There were six letters, and they spelled:

"WONDER."

"Well, my boy," said Frank Reade, Sr., "I have seen all the machinery in models, but not the machinery itself. How am I to judge of its worth if I can't see it?"

"Oh, that's an easy matter, father," replied

Frank, and in a couple of minutes he had both sides of the sheet-iron case open, exposing all the beautiful machinery to view.

Frank Reade, Sr., examined the machinery with minute care, like the experienced machinist and inventor that he was, and then remarked:

"I believe you have made it a success, my boy. I congratulate you. I cannot regret the cost of it in the least. Suppose you get up steam now, and give it a trial?"

"Just what I want to do, father," replied Frank, striking a match and applying it to the oil furnace under the upright boiler. Instantly there was a bright light under there.

"There'll be steam in ten minutes, father," said Frank, "and while waiting for that, come in and look at my palace-car."

The father stepped into the car, which was mounted on four wheels with broad, smooth tires, and looked around with a pleased countenance. There were seats for four—easy, cozy, reclining seats, and sleeping berths for as many more further back. Then there was a small baggage-room and provision closet; a place for guns and other hunting implements, together with many other things needed on a long journey over the plains.

The father took in everything at a glance, and remarked:

"You are a chip of the old block, my boy. I am proud of you, and hope you may have as good a time as I did with the Steam Team and the Tally Ho."

"You can just wager your fortune that I am going to have all the fun there is in it, father," replied Frank, laughing heartily. "I've worked hard at it, and intend to get pay for it in more ways than one."

"That's right. I hear the steam hissing already. That's a powerful heat under there."

"It beats coal or wood, is cheaper, and a barrel of the oil will last a month of constant use," replied Frank.

"But is it entirely safe?"

"A gallon of lard would explode sooner."

Frank sprang off the car and ran to open the door of the carriage-house. Then returning, he re-entered the car, turned one of the half dozen silver-plated, steel-handled rods, and the "Wonder" slowly moved forward, pulling the car after it.

Outside the carriage-house the prairie stretched away southward, until it seemed lost in the horizon.

"Shall we take a ten mile run, father?" Frank asked.

"How long will it take to do that?" his father asked, looking at his watch.

"I don't know," was the reply. "I have calculated on a speed of twenty miles an hour, but I don't know that I can make it."

"Well, if it can make it anywhere, I can do it here. Put her to her top speed."

Frank turned on a full head of steam, and the big driving-wheels revolved faster and faster each minute. The gallant little engine sped along at almost race-horse speed. The faster it went the less noise it made. The smooth open prairie afforded a splendid course, over which it bounded like a thing of life.

"This is about twenty miles an hour," said Frank's father. "It's a complete success, and is the greatest invention of the age! Your fame and fortune are made, my boy!" and Frank Reade.

Jr.'s hand was grasped by his father in hearty congratulation.

"I knew I would succeed, father," he said, "because I knew I was a chip off the old block. You never failed when you went at a thing in earnest, and *neither will I!*"

"Is that your rule in life, my boy?" the happy father asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Then I'll bet my fortune on your success in anything you undertake," replied Frank Reade, Sr. "You had better turn back, as I think you have gone ten miles at least."

Frank turned the Wonder around and started on the return trip.

It made splendid time going back, and soon reached the neighborhood of Readestown, the name of the settlement that had grown up around the farm of Frank Reade, Sr.

As Frank had kept his work quite a secret in the village, the appearance of the Wonder in the streets there created the most intense excitement among the people. Men, women and children ran out to look at it.

"Hang me for a horse-thief!" exclaimed a red-shirted man in front of the Wild West saloon, "of one of them railroad keers ain't a-strikin' out fur herself!"

"Blast my eyes, pards!" cried another, his blood-shot eyes opening wide with amazement. "That'll bust railroad stock higher'n a kite," and many other comments of like character were made as the Wonder dashed on to the carriage-house young Reade had used as a workshop in putting it together.

CHAPTER II.

JACK RUSSELL JOINS THE YOUNG INVENTOR.

The first appearance of the Wonder in the streets in Readestown created a great excitement.

As soon as he returned home, Frank hastened to look it up in the carriage-house, and betake himself to the house with his father.

But he was no sooner in the house than Pomp, the darkey who had accompanied Frank Reade, Sr., on so many of his wild escapades, came running in, saying:

"Fore de Lord, Marse Frank, I do believ dem folks is all gone wild! Dey is jest er crowdin' erroun' de kerridge-house an er tryin' ter get in dar."

"What's the matter with them, Pomp?" young Frank asked.

"Dey dunno what dey wants!" was the reply.

"Go and see, then."

Pomp went out to the carriage-house, and the moment he was seen a dozen voices cried out:

"Hello, Pomp, old charcoal, open the door, an' let us see the runaway steam keer."

Everybody about the village knew Pomp. He was twenty years older now than when he first entered the service of Frank Reade, Sr., and knew more than he did then. He was a privileged character with all the people, because he was the only one of his race there.

"I ain't gwine to open no door," he replied.

"What's de matter wif youse anyhow?"

"Want ter see de kyar," said a red-shirted plainsman.

"Yer ain't er gwine for ter see dat keer till Marse Frank opens de door," he replied.

"When's he gwine ter open it?" red-shirt asked.

"Nex' Christmas," said Pomp, growing nettled at the persistence of the would-be sight-seers.

Red-shirt drew his revolver.

"I ain't killed er nigger in a month," he said, "an' I'm itchin' to shoot one. Ef that ar door ain't open in two minutes, thar'll be a funeral in Africa sure."

"What for youse gwine ter shoot me?" Pomp demanded. "I ain't done nuffin."

"Open that door," repeated red-shirt.

"I ain't got de key," said Pomp.

"Get it, then."

"Well, hole up dat pistil, den."

The red-shirt did "hole up" the pistol, and the next moment Pomp darted forward, like an old ram, and butted him in the stomach with such tremendous force as to lay him out as limber as a wet rag some twenty feet.

"Now youse go way from hyer," said Pomp. "Dis hyer ain't no place for dat kind ob circus."

The crowd yelled and laughed good-naturedly, which had the effect to bring Frank Reade, Jr., and his father from the house. They crowded around, and begged permission to look at the Wonder.

"It will come out to-morrow morning, when you can all see it," said Frank, Jr. "I will start on a trip with it, and demonstrate its worth to the people of the plains."

"What's the use of railroads now?" cried a voice in the crowd.

"What's the use of horses either?" cried another.

"Will it drive away horses?" one asked.

"Of course it will," replied one. "Who'll want a horse eaten his hood off when a machine like this won't eat nothin' when it ain't workin'?"

"Let's bust it, pards!"

"Hurrah for hosses!"

"Down with yer ole merchine!"

"What's the matter wid yer?" demanded Pomp of a huge red-shirted fellow who seemed greatly excited on the horse question.

"Dry up, you son of darkness," growled the man.

"See here, friends," cried Frank Reade, Sr., "do you forget that this is a free country? If a man invents a machine to lessen human labor he is a benefactor of the laboring man, and it's a fool who would object to it. Now, show me the fool who objects to a machine that will do the work of ten or twenty horses. I want to make his acquaintance, and see what kind of an animal he really is. Show him to me. I want to look at him."

There was a good-natured laugh in the crowd, but nobody acknowledged himself a fool, and pretty soon they began to disperse to their homes.

In all Western towns there is always a crowd about the saloons, and Readestown was no exception to the rule. The Union Pacific Railroad had run a branch road up to Readestown and beyond, and thus paved the way for adventurers of every description, who came in to speculate on everything they could make a dollar out of.

In the bar-room of the Great Western Hotel that afternoon and evening the wonderful invention of Frank Reade, Jr., was the theme of discussion.

But Frank took no part in the discussion. He was making preparations for a thousand mile trip south-west, and was looking for his cousin, Jack Russell, on the next train.

Jack Russell and Frank had been class-mates at college, and were great friends. They were inseparable in college rackets, and had been the cause of more disturbances there than any dozen students in the institution.

Frank, on leaving Jack a year before the opening of our story, had exacted a promise from him to come out to Readestown whenever he should telegraph for him.

On the morning of his trial of the Wonder, and when it had proved its success, Frank telegraphed to Jack at New York:

"Come on next train—big thing on wheels."

"FRANK READE, JR."

Two hours later he received a reply:

"I am coming in a big thing on wheels."

"JACK RUSSELL."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Frank, on reading the dispatch. "Good for Jack! He's the same old alligator—always ready for a chunk or a joke."

"What's that about Jack?" his father asked.

"Read that," and Frank handed him the telegraph.

Frank Sr. read it and smiled.

It reminded him of his boyhood days, when he was just that way himself.

When the train came thundering into the little station at Readestown, Frank, Jr., was there to meet his cousin. When it stopped a manly-looking youth about Frank's age stepped off, and Frank darted forward to grasp his hand.

"Jack, old boy, how are you!" exclaimed Frank.

"Frank—pard—glad to see you!" and both went through the pump-handle motion with tremendous energy.

"Hello, Marse Jack!" exclaimed Pomp, his black face shining like polished ebony; "how you is, eh?"

"Pomp, you old buffalo! how are you?" and the generous-hearted youth grasped Pomp's hand and shook it as cordially as he had shaken his cousin's. "How is it with you, old ebony?"

"Nebber was brighter in my life, Marse Jack," replied Pomp, taking the check for his trunk.

"You never were blacker, either, if I remember right," said Jack.

"Yah—yah! Youse right again, Marse Jack; and youse nebber was whiter, was yer?"

"Don't know that I was, old man; but I was a blessed sight handsomer when a pickaninny."

Pomp grinned from ear to ear at the idea of a white pickaninny, and went to secure the newcomer's trunk, which he hoisted on his shoulder and carried out to the little wagon waiting for them.

"Pomp has got your trunk," said Frank.

"Come on. Supper will be ready by the time we reach home," and he led the way to the little wagon in the rear of the station.

They sprang in and seated themselves on the back seat. Pomp took up the reins and drove off.

"I say, Frank," said Jack, as they dashed through the village in the gathering twilight, "what is this big thing on wheels you spoke of in your dispatch?"

"Can't you choke off that curiosity till to-morrow?" Frank asked.

"Well, I might, but you'd find me choked dead to-morrow morning," he replied.

Frank laughed.

"You ought to have been a girl, Jack," he said. "Glad I am not, though, old boy," was the quick response. "No petticoats on me, if you please. I am very fond of the girls, though."

"Well, I'll tell you all about it to-morrow—"

"No, you won't! You'll tell me all about it this evening, or there'll be a funeral in this village, with a youth of your size the subject for the parson. Understand?"

"Did you bring your shooting-irons with you?" Frank asked.

"Of course I did. What fool would come West without 'em?"

"Then I'll have to unbosom myself to you to-night. Do you know how to ride a velocipede?"

"Of course I do, and have been under a pledge for a year to kill any man who even suggests riding one to me. Beware."

Frank laughed again in the heartiest way imaginable.

"Wouldn't you like to ride a new style of velocipede?" he asked.

"Not if it is called by that name," he said.

"Now look here, Frank Reade, Jr., if you have sent for me to ride anything called a velocipede, or that runs on the velocipede principle, I'll murder you in the bewitching hour of midnight. Again I say, beware!"

"He, he, he!" giggled old Pomp. "Crowd 'im up to de wall, Marse Jack. He's a bad un, he is."

"I know him, Pomp, and am going to club the old Nick out of him if he has played any old joke on me."

"Dat's right, dat's right, Marse Jack!" chuckled Pomp. "Dey won't let me lick 'im, but I'll hole yer coat."

Both enjoyed the old darkey hugely, and in a few minutes more the little wagon halted in front of the Reade residence.

Frank Reade, Sr., was waiting to welcome his nephew.

"Hello, Uncle Frank!" greeted Jack, leaning to the ground and grasping his uncle's hand.

"Why, Jack, my boy!" exclaimed Frank, Sr., "you are almost a man in size!"

"Oh, I'm a man all over," said Jack, breaking away from him to rush forward and kiss Mrs. Reade and a half dozen children from fifteen down to one year old.

They gave him an old-fashioned reception, for his mother was the only sister of Frank Reade, Sr. They liked him because he was young Frank's companion in college, and was his best-loved friend.

"Come right in to supper, Jack," said Mrs. Reade, "as soon as you wash the dust out of your eyes."

He did so, and during the meal he had to answer a thousand questions about home and the dear ones he had left behind him.

Annie Reade was a sweet, shy girl of fifteen, who sat opposite to her cousin and listened to his report of his brothers and sisters at home.

"Sister Lizzie is just like cousin Annie there," he said; "almost the image of her."

"Oh, brother!" she exclaimed, turning to Frank, "won't you take the Wonder and go after her? I know she would like so much to pay us a visit."

"Wonder?" exclaimed Jack, looking from one to the other. "That's the big thing on wheels, is it?"

"Yes," said one of the younger ones, "it's got a big lot of wheels, and can go faster'n a railroad, and it don't want no old track either."

"What in blue blazes are you talking about?" exclaimed Jack.

"Frank has invented some kind of an engine and car that doesn't need any track," explained Mrs. Reade, "and he's going to take a trip with it to-morrow, I believe."

CHAPTER III.

ON THE BOUNDLESS PRAIRIE.

JACK RUSSELL opened his eyes in astonishment when Mrs. Reade had finished speaking.

"So that's it, eh?" he said, turning to Frank.

"Yes; that's it exactly," Frank replied.

"Where is it? I want to see it before I sleep."

"Oh, you can't see it now," said Frank. "The door is locked, the key lost, and a tub over the chimney."

"Then I'll go through the key-hole," said Jack.

"Plugged!" exclaimed Frank.

"Window," said Jack.

"None," replied Frank.

"I give it up."

"Good boy. Now come and see that your things are right for a thousand-mile journey to the south-west to-morrow."

Frank led the way up to the room that had been assigned his cousin, and there told him everything in regard to the Wonder, and the pleasure trip he proposed to start on to-morrow morning.

Jack was delighted.

"Frank, old boy," he exclaimed, "nothing could have suited me better. I brought a brace of seven-shooters and a splendid repeating-rifle with me, hoping I would get a chance at some buffalo while out here."

"Good for you. We'll have all the buffalo-shooting we want. We'll go right in among the buffaloes. Pomp will go with us, and I have a repeating-rifle for him, and one for myself. Oh, we'll have a glorious time, and don't you forget it."

"I know that, old boy. Of course we don't want to take our trunks with us?"

"We could if we wish to."

"Are you going to take yours?"

"No. I'll place such things as I think I may need in a drawer, and leave my trunk at home."

"Is there another drawer?"

"There are four of them."

"Then I'll leave my trunk."

And forthwith Jack commenced unpacking his trunk, placing such things as he thought he might need on the bed to be carried to the Wonder in the morning.

In a half hour he had his trunk repacked and locked, and was ready to talk over the old times they had at college.

The reader can well imagine how they sat up till long after midnight talking over their plans and enjoying the trip in anticipation.

At last they retired, however, to dream of the morrow.

The morrow came clear, beautiful and bright, and Pomp had the two cousins up ahead of the sun.

Just as the sun was gilding the housetops of the village Jack and Frank went into the carriage-house to look at the Wonder.

"Great Jehosaphat!" exclaimed Jack, on seeing the beautiful engine, "but she's a beauty!"

"She's a darling," said Frank, "and does she work like a good girl."

"But I can't see any of her machinery, Frank."

"Oh, her machinery is inside of her—all inclosed, to keep the dust out of her joints."

"That's a good idea—a brilliant idea, old boy. Nothing is exposed to view—not even the crank that turns the driving-wheels."

"No, and that's what'll puzzle people when they see her. They won't know how she runs."

"That's a pretty smoke-stack."

"Well, that's where you are fooled. It isn't a smoke-stack at all. She doesn't make any smoke."

"The deuce!"

"Fact."

"How's that?"

"I use oil which doesn't smoke."

"But oil will smoke."

"That depends upon how you use it."

"Of course—that settles it."

"Oh, it's all right. Here comes Pomp with the camp cooking utensils. He was with father and the steam Tally Ho twenty years ago, you remember."

"Yes—we couldn't do without Pomp."

"Oh, father said I couldn't go without him. Says Pomp has forgotten more about such trips than I will learn in a year."

"Well, if he has forgotten it, what use can he be to us?"

"Oh, he remembers enough for us, you can wager, every time."

Pomp carried everything they needed to the car and stowed them away in their proper places, while Jack and Frank were at breakfast.

After breakfast they took leave of the family and went out to the Wonder. Pomp had lighted the furnace, and the steam was hissing like a dozen serpents.

"Open the door, Pomp," said Frank.

Pomp opened the door of the carriage-house, and then leaped aboard.

Frank pulled the whistle-bar, and a shrill whistle startled the whole village. The next moment the Wonder moved out of the house, and turned through the principal street.

"Up with the flag, Pomp," said Jack, and Pomp ran out on the engine and ran up a small United States flag from the smoke-stack.

Then the street began to fill with men, women and children, cheering wildly and running after it.

Jack and Frank leaned out of the windows and waved their hats to the crowd, which responded with the wildest cheers ever heard.

"Good-bye, boys!" cried Frank, waving his hat to his young acquaintances. "We are off to the land of the Comanches!"

"Hold on, Frank!" scores of them cried—"give us a ride before you go!"

"Wait till we come back," said Frank, pulling at the steam-valve handle, which sent the Wonder ahead of the crowd like a scared rabbit.

They were soon out on the open prairie, where Frank turned on a full head of steam. The Wonder dashed ahead at a rattling speed.

"By George! Frank," exclaimed Jack, "this is glorious! But suppose we were to run against a rock?"

"There'd be a smash-up—that's all," said Frank. "But who ever saw a rock out here in the open prairie?"

"Well, suppose we were to run into a river or chasm?"

"We'd be drowned or smashed up, and would deserve to be. What in thunder do you want to run into a river for?"

"Oh, I'm not anxious to run into any river. I was looking up possibilities."

"Well, we are not going to have that kind of possibilities. We are going to travel by daylight, and moonlight, too, when we can get it clear and good."

Jack then turned his attention to inspecting the interior of the car. The sleeping-berths and the little cooking apartment interested him greatly. Pomp took pleasure in showing him everything. Then he turned to the curious little upright engine, and examined the workings of the oil-furnace.

"A gallon of oil will last thirty hours," said Frank, "and I have a forty-gallon barrel on board."

"Whew!" exclaimed Jack. "That makes you independent of fuel."

"Yes—we don't ask any favors of anybody. I've got a hose and a pipe that'll throw boiling water fifty feet in any direction."

"How far have we come now?"

"One and a half hours out," said Frank, looking at his watch. "I guess we have come some twenty-five or thirty miles."

Jack was astounded. The Wonder ran smoothly and almost noiselessly. Even heavy tufts of grass made no jolting, and there was no rattling of steel against steel to make a deafening racket. When night came they had traveled over one hundred and fifty miles. They halted on the banks of a small stream, and shot a deer for supper.

Pomp had venison steak and coffee for supper, and they all ate with a hearty relish.

All three slept in the sleeping-berths, and never slept sweeter in their lives. The door locked, no one could get in, and the car was both fire and bullet-proof, hence they had no disturbing fears.

The next morning they were up at sunrise, going along the banks of the stream looking for game.

Jack stood at the forward window, rifle in hand, watching for game of any description. Jack-rabbits by hundreds were bounced, but they were difficult to hit while both hunter and game were in motion.

At last a couple of coyotes were bounced. They dashed away together, and Frank turned the Wonder in pursuit.

"Hi, hi, yi!" yelled Pomp, as Jack fired, and the frightened wolves laid themselves out to do their best to get away from there.

But the Wonder, going at the rate of twenty miles an hour, was not an easy thing to run away from. In a little while they heard the coyotes howl in despairing terror, and then separate.

Pomp brought one down with his rifle, but the other got away.

They then turned and made their way back toward the stream which the chase had drawn them away from.

They traveled along during the day at the rate of about ten miles per hour, getting a few shots at straggling buffaloes, and chasing one of them till he plunged headlong into the stream.

That night they encamped on the banks of the same stream, and had jack-rabbit for supper, retreating to bed at about ten o'clock, leaving everything secure.

Some time after midnight they were startled by a series of unearthly yells outside.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Pomp, "dem's red-skins!" and he sprang up and grabbed his revolvers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MIDNIGHT ATTACK.

For a moment or two the two young friends were too much surprised to make any movement toward a defense of the wonder.

The reader will remember that Frank Reade, Jr., and his cousin, Jack Russell, were both under eighteen years of age, and had never seen hostile Indians in their lives. It is true that Frank had seen a great many red-skins, having been born in the West, yet he had never seen them in war-paint, nor heard their war-whoop. He and Jack had read much of their cruelty to those who were so unfortunate as to fall into their hands, and were, therefore, greatly excited when they were so unexpectedly awakened by the yells of the red demons outside the car.

But old Pomp was there. He had a supreme contempt for Indians individually, as he had fought and butted them from the Canada line almost to the Gulf in the days of the Steam Team and Steam Tally Ho. His experience stood him good in this moment of peril.

"Hush-sh!" he cautioned. "Don't yer say a word, Marse Frank," and then he went to the windows, which were closed, and peered through the blinds at the yelling demons outside.

He could see them moving about in the clear starlight, greatly puzzled to know exactly what kind of a prize they had captured.

Frank and Jack also took peeps at them.

There seemed to be at least half a hundred of them.

But by this time both Frank and Jack had regained their wits.

"I say, Jack!" whispered Frank, "I think if we get up steam we can get away from them."

"Dat's so," said Pomp. "But dey can't git yer, nohow, 'case dey can't git in. Dey can't burn der keer, neder."

"They are climbing up on top," said Jack, as the noise of a dozen red demons climbing upon the roof was plainly heard inside.

"We'll give 'em a surprise that'll make 'em think we are the Old Nick," said Frank, creeping forward and lighting the oil furnace under the boiler. He closed the furnace door quickly, so the light would not be seen, and then quietly waited for the steam to generate.

In some ten or fifteen minutes there was a good head of steam on.

"Now blow dat whistle, Marse Frank," whispered old Pomp, "an' see dem red niggers roll off'n dar!"

"All ready for a sudden start!" said Frank, pulling the whistle-cranks.

There was a piercing scream of the whistle that utterly paralyzed the red rascals. They yelled in a terror of fright, and rolled off the top of the car like turtles off a log when an alligator comes to pay them a visit.

The next moment the Steam Wonder darts forward, one poor fellow being run over and crushed, and soon they are a quarter of a mile away from the camp.

The Indians fired a volley at the Wonder as she drew away from them, and the young friends heard the leaden messengers rattle against the side of the car.

"Shoot er way, yer red niggers!" cried Pomp, gleefully, "yer can't hurt dis chile. Dis am de boss dat lefs yer behine ebberry time."

"I wonder if they will pursue us?" Frank remarked.

"I don't know," replied Jack.

"I'll wait and see," and he shut off steam. The Wonder came to a full halt.

The rear door was opened, and Frank peered out in the darkness to listen.

"Shut dat door, Marse Frank!" cried old Pomp. "Yer doan want er take no stock in Injuns. Shet it, I tole yer! De fust ting yer know ye'll be clim'ing dem golden stairs wid er bullet-hole in yer."

"Oh, we left 'em a mile back yonder, Pomp," said Frank, shutting the door.

"Yer can't bet whar dem Injuns is," said Pomp. "Dey's jes like er flea. When youse tink you've got 'im he's er hoppin' er roun' libely as eber. Doan tell me nuffin 'bout Injuns! I'se got my wool yit 'case I'se too smart for 'em."

"Well, what must we do now?" Frank asked.

"I think we'd better light the head-light, so we can know where we are going," suggested Jack.

"We might run into or against something, and then we'd be ruined."

"That's so," replied Frank. "I'll light it at once, for we may have to run again."

"Better look out dar!" said Pomp, warningly, as Frank opened a very narrow door and ran out on a still narrower platform to the head of the engine.

He struck a match, and in another moment a stream of brilliant light shot forth from the powerful reflector, enabling our heroes to see small ob-

jects plainly at a distance of two hundred yards from the engine.

"That's the thing!" exclaimed Jack, as he gazed ahead. "We need fear nothing now as long as we keep a good lookout ahead."

Frank regained the car without having seen an Indian, and all three then waited to see what would be the result of the move.

Ten minutes later, Frank heard them yelling in the direction of the stream they had just left.

"Deys er comin'!" said Pomp, who was listening for the first sounds of pursuit.

"Let 'em come," remarked Frank. "They can't do us any harm."

"Let's give 'em a few bullets, Frank," suggested Jack.

"No—shed no blood unless compelled to. Father warned me against firing on Indians just because they were Indians. They are human beings as well as ourselves."

Jack was astonished.

He had been reared in New York, where he had got the idea in his head that white men on the plains shot Indians as they did deer, buffalo and other game, every time they got a chance. He saw that Frank was right, and put up his repeating rifle, which he had taken down.

"What will you do now?" he asked.

"Oh, we'll wait and see what they do," replied Frank.

"Hyer dey come!" cried Pomp.

With deafening yells the red-skins came on mounted on their ponies.

"I'll give 'em a scare," said Frank, pulling the steam-valve, and turning the right guide-bar.

The Wonder at once moved forward, making a circle till the light from the reflector was turned full upon the astonished Indians.

The light blinded horses and riders alike, so they could see nothing very plainly.

Then Frank bore down upon them. They couldn't tell whether the Wonder was approaching or receding till it was almost upon them.

Then Frank took the small hose-pipe and turned on a stream of boiling water upon them, at the same time making the steam-whistle split their ears with its unearthly shrieks.

The whistle scattered the Indian ponies in every direction, and the scalding water gave the red-skins good cause to yell. They yelled and swore in broken English, rubbing their backs and faces wherever the hot water touched them.

"Hi-hi-yah-yah!" yelled Pomp. "How youse like dat, yer red niggers?"

Crack—crack—crack! went half a hundred rifles, and the leaden hail rattled against the Wonder, and fell flattened to the ground.

"Oh, shoot away, shoot away!" laughed Frank. "I've not the laugh on you, and that's all I care for."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Jack, in a convulsive fit of laughter. "Did you ever see fellows scatter as they did?"

"I never did," replied Frank. "But I'll chase a few of them until they are sick of this business," and then he turned the light so as to reveal the whereabouts of a party of red-skins.

The moment he got sight of them he dashed forward in hot pursuit.

Of course the terrified rascals put their ponies to the top of their speed, and dashed away over the prairie. The Wonder gained steadily on them, whistling fiercely at every hundred yards.

The Indians now believed that old Nick was after them, and made desperate efforts to get out of the way. They lashed their ponies till the white foam flecked their sides.

Finally they scattered, hoping thus to break up the pursuit. But Frank resolved to run down one of them. He kept after one who seemed to be a leader among them, keeping about fifty yards behind him so as to prevent him from suddenly dodging to one side.

The Indian lashed his pony most unmercifully, and the gallant little animal made a splendid run for some fifteen or twenty miles. Then, as if nature had been forced to yield to man, he suddenly dropped down dead in his tracks.

"Ah! He's down!" cried Frank, blowing the whistle.

"There he goes afoot!" exclaimed Jack. "Let me give him a bullet in the back!"

"No—no—no!" thundered Frank. "Wait. We'll run him down as we did his pony."

The Indian was a good runner, but what man could ever run against steam? The Wonder pushed him hard, and kept him going at the top of his speed, till he, too, gave a despairing yell and sank down to the ground.

CHAPTER V.

SHEARING AN INDIAN.

THE moment the Indian fell to the ground,

Frank slowed up and halted the Wonder alongside of him.

"He's run down," said Frank, "and can't run another step."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp; "you'se done gone an' busted his wind, Marse Frank."

"Run out and fetch him in, Pomp, and we'll have some fun with him."

Pomp's eyes stretched open as big as saucers.

"What fo' yer want dat red debbil in hyar, Marse Frank?"

"Oh, we'll have some fun with him," said Frank. "Bring him in; he ain't got any friends."

Jack opened the door, and Pomp stepped out and picked up the almost unconscious savage in his arms.

Pomp was a Hercules in strength.

He walked up into the car with that Indian in his grasp as easily as an ordinary man would carry a ten-year old boy.

"Lay him down on the floor, Pomp," said Frank.

Pomp laid him down, with the remark:

"He's drefful limber, Marse Frank."

The savage seemed to be unconscious of everything around him.

"Take his weapons away, Jack," said Frank. Jack could only find a knife and tomahawk.

He had dropped his gun in his maddened flight.

"Give him some water, Pomp."

Pomp took a tin cup full of water and held it to his lips. The moment he felt the water on his tongue the red-skin eagerly grabbed the cup, and swallowed its contents.

"How yer like dat?" Pomp asked.

"Ugh, wah!" grunted the Indian; "water good."

"Would you like some whisky, red-skin?" Frank asked.

"Ugh! Yes, Indian love whisky."

"Give him some, Pomp."

"What fo' yer gib him whisky, Marse Frank?" Pomp asked, astonished at the order.

"Oh, I want to show him what a fool he has been in bucking against the Steam Wonder."

"Oh, dat's it, eh? Wal, I wouldn't waste no good liker on no ole Injun ef I was yer. Hyer, yer red nigger—take 'dat an' see what a blamed fool yer am!"

Pomp handed him the tin cup half filled with whisky, which he poured from a demijohn in the provision closet.

The Indian gulped down the liquor like an old toper, smacking his lips and feeling greatly refreshed.

"You didn't expect to get a good drink of liquor, did you?" Frank asked.

"Um—no. White mans no bad mans."

"But you are a bad Indian, I see," said Frank.

"No—me good Indian."

"What did you shoot at us for?"

"No see you—Indian see big wagon—no hoss. Run away—ugh!"

"You didn't know what it was?"

"No—no hoss—heap wagon!"

Frank smiled at the idea of the untutored savage. He couldn't realize how a wagon could travel without horses to pull it. Perhaps they had never seen any of the trains on the Union Pacific Railroad.

"Well, you Indians must let all wagons alone," said Frank. "You had no right to bother us when you found us."

The Indian made no reply.

Those red rovers of the plains held that they had the right to plunder everything that came in their way, hence the prisoner made no reply when Frank said what he did.

"Some day a wagon will come along and destroy all your people," said Frank, "if you don't let wagons alone."

"Get the scissors and cut all his hair off, Pomp."

Pomp saw fun ahead.

He went in to one of the drawers, and brought out a pair of shears. He took a handful of hair, and clipped it off before the savage had any idea as to what he was doing. Then the truth flashed over his mind that he was to be shorn of his scalp lock.

He gave a defiant yell and sprang to his feet.

"Hole still dar!" said Pomp, making a grab for another handful of hair.

The Indian made a grab for the shears, and then a terrific struggle ensued.

"Thunder, Frank!" exclaimed Jack, "he'll kill the nigger!"

"Just you wait and see the nigger get away with the Indian. The red-skin doesn't live that can get away with black Pomp. There! What did I tell you! Now, Pomp will shear him like a sheep!"

The struggle lasted less than one minute. The red-skin was no match for the burly black, and in a twinkling Pomp had him on the floor, sitting

astride and cutting his hair as nonchalantly as if shearing a sheep.

During the struggle the Indian never said a word.

He lay with closed eyes and bated breath.

"Dar!" exclaimed Pomp, "youse er bald-headed Injun now!"

Jack and Frank burst into a hearty laugh at the comical sight.

The Indian seemed all at once to have lost his manhood. His spirit was broken, and there was no longer a defiant look in his black eyes.

He arose to a sitting posture, and looked straight at the burly black who had shorn him of his locks.

"What's der matter wid yer, ole man?" Pomp asked, seeing how doleful the Indian looked.

But the disgraced savage made no reply.

"Open the door, Jack," said Frank, "and let him go."

Jack opened the door.

Frank gave the savage his knife and tomahawk, saying:

"You may go. We are not your enemies. We cut off your hair to show you that we could cut off your head just as well. Tell your people to let us alone and we'll not bother them."

The savage took the knife and tomahawk, and moodily turned away without uttering a word. He stepped out into the darkness, and disappeared from view.

"He's a sick Indian, if ever there was one," remarked Frank; "for they think it a great disgrace to lose their hair."

"He isn't exactly scalped," said Jack; "but his people will know that he could have been had we so desired."

"Yes, but he won't let his people see him, though, till his hair grows out again."

"What shall we do now?"

"Guess we'd better stop here till daylight, which is yet two hours off," replied Frank.

"Is it as far off as that? Then I am going to get some more sleep. I haven't had my nap out yet."

"Just my case. Put out the furnace fire, Pomp."

Pomp put out the furnace fire, and then all three prepared to go to bed again. When all were ready, Frank put out the lamp and went to bed himself.

They soon fell asleep, and slept till after sunrise.

Pomp was the first one of the three to wake up.

"De Lord bress me!" he exclaimed, "we's been er-sleepin' er week!"

"Hello!" cried Jack. "What's that you say, Pomp?"

"Git up, I say!" and he threw up the steel blinds, and let in a flood of light.

The sun was shining bright and clear, making the dew on the grass seem like so many pendant diamonds.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BUFFALO HUNT—A STRANGE CAPTURE.

JACK and Frank sprang out of their beds and looked out of the windows. The scene was a lovely one.

As far as the eyes could reach nothing but the illimitable prairie could be seen.

"By George!" ejaculated Jack, "this is the grandest view on land I ever saw."

"Yes," said Frank, "it's an ocean of grass as far as we can see."

"Yes, and hundreds of miles further, besides."

"What's yer got fo' breckfus, Marse Frank?" Pomp called out from the little kitchen.

"Make some coffee," replied Frank. "I guess we can scare up some game pretty soon."

"Oh, we've got plenty of bacon and—"

"Yes—but we don't want to eat that unless we are obliged to," said Frank, proceeding to light the furnace fire. "We may need it, and that's why I prefer game as long as we can get it."

Pomp went to work to make coffee and bread. In a few minutes there was steam enough to move them.

The Wonder moved slowly at first, and then faster and faster, till they attained a speed of some ten miles an hour.

Suddenly a deer leaped up in the tall grass in front of the Wonder, and darted away in the very direction our hero wanted to go.

"Now for some venison steak for breakfast!" cried Frank, putting on a full head of steam.

The deer bounded away in a great fright, leaving the Wonder far behind.

"By George!" exclaimed Jack, "he'll beat us, sure!"

"Never!" said Frank. "He can't hold out, and we can. He'll weaken in an hour, and then we'll bring him down with ease."

So it proved.

The deer made a gallant run of some twenty miles, after which he began to show signs of distress.

"He's weakening!" cried Jack, getting his rifle ready.

"Yes, he can't escape us!"

"Crack!" went Jack's rifle, but he missed.

"Try it again!" cried Frank.

Crack! went another shot, and the deer sprang up some three feet or more and fell dead in his tracks.

"That fetched him!" cried Frank, shutting off steam and stopping alongside the game.

Pomp went out and secured the carcass. It was a small one, and was soon landed in the kitchen, where he cut it up, throwing out all the useless parts as the car dashed along over the prairie.

"Ah!" said Frank, "this is glorious! This is just what I have been aiming at for a year."

"You have made a splendid success of it, I should say."

"Yes, I believe I have."

"It will create a revolution in Western travel."

"I think it will."

"But how will it do in deep snow?"

"I don't know. I think I can make a steam sleigh, though, that would make sleighing as easy as winking."

"That would be the thing!" exclaimed Jack, and then he suddenly looked out of the window and saw five wagons, some three miles away, going in the same direction the Wonder was going.

"See there!" he cried; "there goes an old-style traveling party."

Frank gazed through the window at the five wagons, with their tops.

"Yes," he said, "they are going south-west. I guess they are emigrants. I'll go down and see them just to hear their comments on the Wonder."

Giving a shrill whistle he turned and made direct for the little wagon-train. The wagons halted, and every soul seemed greatly excited as they watched its approach.

"They don't know what to make of us," said Frank.

"No, but they know well we are not Indians."

"Of course—just see how the men, women and children stare! I'll give them another whistle."

He did, and the horses of the wagon-train grew restless and showed signs of fright.

To prevent any runaways the Wonder was turned so as to come up in the rear of the last wagon, where it came to a standstill.

"Hello!" cried Frank, running out on the engine platform.

"Hello!" came back from the guide of the party. "What in blue blazes are yer doin' off yer track!"

"Ain't got any track," returned Frank, "and don't want any."

The whole party, a score or more in number, came trooping around the Wonder, wondering if they were dreaming.

"Thunder and chain lightning!" exclaimed the guide, "yer don't mean to tell me yer don't need a track for that ar machine?"

"You saw us drive up, old man," replied Frank. "Where's the track, eh?"

"Hang me for a galoot!" exclaimed the old guide, "ef the days of guides ain't ended. Who made that thing, sonny?"

"I did," replied Frank, proudly.

"Wal, I'm sorry for yer, I am," he said, contemptuously. "Yer'll die young—too much brain without sense. Cl'ar outen hyer now! Don't come around me with yer durned old whistle, or I'll blow yer full o' holes!"

"Why, what in blazes is the matter with you, old man?"

"Git out!" growled the old guide. That Union Pacific Railroad drove us guides away down hyer, and now you come snortin' erlong with a blasted ole steam machine to break us up. Git out, I say, or by the great prairie I'll fill yer skin chock full of lead."

"All right, old man. Good-bye!" and Frank turned away with the Wonder, to the intense disgust of the emigrants, who wanted to see more of the wonderful invention and its inventor.

"Hanged if this don't beat all," said Jack, as the Wonder steamed away, leaving the little wagon-train behind.

"Yes," replied Frank. "He must be a crusty old crank, whose business has been broken up by the Pacific Railroad. He thinks this will kill his business completely."

"He must be a cranky old fool," said Jack.

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp, with a look of supreme disgust on his black face.

"Oh, I guess there isn't many like him in the world," remarked Frank.

"More than you have any idea of, Frank."

"Well, they'll get badly left, that's all," remarked the young inventor. "People who don't

keep up with the progress of the age will get left. This old crank back there will die cursing the new-fangled ideas of the day."

"The sooner such fools die the better off the country will be. Hello! There's buffalo, as I'm a sinner!"

Away out on the plains ahead of them a score or more of dark objects were seen. Frank seized his telescope and leveled it at them.

"Yes," he said, "they are buffalo. We'll have some fine sport."

"Dar's some Injuns out dar, too," said Pomp. "Where?"

"Out dar on dere hosses," said he, pointing in another direction where a party of a score or more of mounted Indians were seen bearing down on the small herd of buffalo.

"They are trying to beat us," said Frank. "Get your rifles ready, and we'll see who'll get the best game."

Full of excitement over his first sight of buffalo, Jack Russell got his splendid repeating-rifle in readiness. Pomp was also in arms.

Frank turned on a full head of steam and dashed forward at a tremendous pace.

Of course the Wonder beat the Indian ponies. The game took the alarm, and, with heads down and tails up, started off on a hard run.

That was just what Frank wanted. He could keep up with them, and let Jack and Pomp pick out the best in the herd.

The Indians seemed utterly paralyzed at the appearance of the Wonder in the chase. They halted and stared till the chase was a mile ahead of them. Then, with fierce yells, they started in pursuit of the Wonder.

After a two-mile run Frank ran alongside of three or four fine buffaloes. Jack and Pomp made quick work with their repeating rifles—giving each three or four bullets in succession at close range.

They dropped in their tracks, gave a few kicks, and yielded up their lives, victims to the rapacity of man.

Pushing on, they brought down four more, after which the herd scattered.

"That'll do," said Frank. "We've got more than we want now."

"It's fine sport, though," said Jack, anxious to get another shot.

"Of course it is, but we must look after our game. Hanged if those Indians ain't cutting up those we first brought down! We'll run 'em down and make 'em disgorge!"

Turning the Wonder around, he steamed away in the direction of the four dead buffaloes.

The Indians saw it coming, and scattered in every direction.

"They are afraid, the cowardly skunks!" cried Frank.

On reaching the four buffaloes they found the hides cut all to pieces.

The Indians knew that white hunters only killed the buffalo for the sake of his hide. They cut the hides to render them valueless to the whites.

"Confound 'em!" exclaimed Frank, on seeing their work. "I've a mind to shave the heads of every one of them!"

"Better out dere heads off!" growled Pomp.

They got out and cut off four hind quarters, which Pomp said he could cure on the top of the car. Then they returned and took the hides off the others—fine, magnificent robes, which Pomp said he would salt and cure on the top of the car.

"Now for more Indian hair!"

The Wonder was put in pursuit of the band. The red-skins instantly scattered.

"Follow that fellow on the gray horse!" said Jack.

"All right," and the Wonder put after him at full speed. The gray was a powerful horse and made good time, but in a couple of hours he fell to the ground, the rider rolling off and drawing his weapons to defend himself.

"Surrender, you red thief!" cried Jack, leveling a rifle at him.

"Yes—don't shoot!" cried the fellow, in plain English.

"Throw down your weapons!"

Down went the weapons on the ground.

"Hold up your hands!"

Up went his hands.

"Go out and get them, Pomp."

Pomp went out and secured the arms of the rascal.

"Now come in," next ordered Frank.

The fellow marched in. He was in full Indian dress.

"De Lord gorramitey!" exclaimed Pomp, on taking a good look at the fellow. "Dat ain't no Injun! Dat's er white man, suah!"

"Are you a white man?" asked Frank.

"Yes," was the reply. "Don't shoot me! Wait till you hear my story. You will not blame me then."

CHAPTER VII.

A WHOLESALE RESCUE.

THE astonishment of Frank and Jack, on learning that their prisoner was a white man like themselves, was unbounded. They were so indignant that they felt a strong temptation to shoot him on the spot.

But his plea that they would first hear his story excited an interest they could not resist.

"What in thunder is your story?" demanded Frank, lowering his revolver, and glaring at the man.

In the Far West, the renegade who joins the Indians and puts on their hideous war-paint, is far more hated than the genuine Indian is, hence Frank's strong inclination to shoot the man on learning that he was not an Indian pure and simple.

"My name is Dick Morgan," said the prisoner. "I was born and reared in Arkansas, where both my parents are buried. They both died suddenly a little over a year ago. As soon as they were buried I took my young sister, Julia, and joined a party of neighbors who were going to the Southwest, and went with them. We were out a month when one night we were attacked and overpowered by Apaches. They killed all the old women and all the men except Bill Lucky and myself, who escaped in the darkness. Bill and I were together three days when, on another dark night, we were separated. I never saw him again. In my despair I resolved to pretend to be a fugitive from the whites and join the Indians. That very afternoon I saw a party of Apache hunters. I signaled to them to approach. They came up and seized me. I told them my story, and they believed, took me into their tribe, where I found several white men, fugitives from justice, and made me one of themselves."

"Are you telling me the truth?" Frank asked.

"As God is my judge, I am telling the truth," replied the man.

"How long have you been playing Indian?"

"About a year—looking out all the time for a chance to escape with my sister. I would not leave without her."

"You found her, then?"

"Yes—she and four other young girls whom the Indians kept."

"How have they been treated?"

"Two of them have been made wives of by chiefs. The others are to be treated the same way soon. My sister was to have been made the wife of a chief six months ago, but the Comanches killed him, which was all that saved her."

"Where are those girls now?"

"At an Apache village, about two hundred miles south-west from here," replied Morgan.

"Are you willing to go there with us after them?"

"Yes. I am willing to risk my life for them at any time I can see a glimmer of hope."

"Well, if we can get this car into their village, we can rescue them without any difficulty," said Frank, "as no band of enemies can get inside unless they have artillery with which to batter us to pieces. We have five repeating-rifles, plenty of ammunition, and nearly a dozen six-shooters. We can whip a body of one hundred warriors in ten minutes, at any time."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, go to their rescue. If you fail, we will all be killed; but I prefer death to this suspense any longer."

"Tell me, can we reach there without crossing a stream? That's something we can't do, you know."

Morgan hung his head and remained several minutes in deep thought. Suddenly he looked up and said:

"There is a way, but it's a long one—four hundred miles or more."

"Oh, that doesn't matter. We can make that in two days."

"Two days?"

"Yes—even more, if pushed," replied Frank.

"Then go north-west till you strike the head-waters of the White River. Turn that and go south. There's no stream in the way on that side," said Morgan.

Jack turned to Frank and asked:

"Have you water enough for the trip?"

"No; we'll fill the barrels at the head-waters of White River."

"There are not many warriors at the village now, I suppose?" said Frank.

"No—very few, if any. They are out hunting for buffalo and small emigrant trains."

"Well, we'll give them a taste of their devilish work. Wash off that paint, and try to look like a white man once more. I think I have a suit of clothes that will fit you."

Pomp led him into the kitchen, where a plentiful application of soap and water changed him from a hideous-looking Indian to a very good-

looking young white man of some twenty-two or three years.

He was about the size of Frank, and the suit of clothes the young inventor gave him fitted him exactly.

"Why, you are really a decent-looking white man, Dick Morgan," said Jack Russell, when he came out into the main room of the car.

"I never felt more proud of myself in my life," replied Morgan. "The white man is certainly the highest type of the human race."

"Right you are, my boy," said Frank, grasping his hand. "My name is Frank Reade, Jr., and this is my cousin, Jack Russell. Pomp, there, is an African prince—the last of his royal race."

Pomp grinned from ear to ear as he acknowledged the introduction, but said nothing in reply to the "whopper" Frank had put upon the newcomer.

Morgan was the happiest man they had ever seen in their lives. He examined everything, and asked a thousand questions about the Wonder. He also told many strange stories of his adventures among the Apaches.

The Wonder was put to its full speed all that day. They came in sight of trees, which denoted the presence of water, at about an hour before sunset. They reached the water before night, refilled their barrels, and then pushed up-stream till near midnight. Then they stopped, and all went to bed.

At daylight Pomp woke them all up, and started the Wonder on its way. He cooked buffalo steaks and bread and coffee whilst going at the rate of eighteen or twenty miles an hour.

About noon they turned the head-waters of White River, pushed down on the other side.

The smooth prairie afforded them a splendid run. Coyotes, deer, buffalo, prairie-dogs, and any quantity of feathered game were routed up, but they did not stop to shoot.

"Save time and ammunition," said Frank. "We need both when we reach the Apache village."

They encamped on the banks of the White River that night.

"I don't think we can be more than fifty or sixty miles from the village now," said Morgan.

"Then we'll reach it early to-morrow morning," said Jack.

"Yes," said Frank. "We'll rush right into the village. All the women and children will run out to see us. Morgan will call the girls by name; and they, knowing his voice, will run to us. We can take them in and rush away before the others can realize what has been done."

"Yes, that's the plan," said Morgan. "They understand that I am on the lookout for a chance to escape, and will lose no time in joining me."

That night Frank made an examination of every joint in the machinery of the Wonder. He found everything all right and singularly free from dust, and distributed oil quite freely.

The next morning the journey was resumed.

"Now for the village!" cried Frank. "Morgan, show the way, and we'll be there in three hours."

"Keep right down the river. You can't miss it," said Morgan.

"All right."

Away they went, and game of every description scampered out of the way of the monster.

"I see de wigwams!" cried Pomp, as the first lodge-pole came in sight.

"That's the village," said Morgan.

"Get ready, then, for any emergency," said Frank. "We'll soon be there."

Steadily they rushed forward until at last the few children playing about the village were startled, seeing the monster right in their midst. Then Frank made the echoes ring with the steam whistle, a thing never heard before in that part of the world.

Men, women and children came tumbling out of the wigwams with terrified faces.

"Julia Morgan come here!" called Dick Morgan, opening the door of the car; "here's liberty and home for all of us."

Julia recognized her brother's voice and sprang forward.

"It's brother Dick!" she cried. "Come on, girls!"

The other four sprang after her. A half dozen old squaws ran after them, but Frank blew the whistle again, which frightened them back, and the girls gained the car.

"Come in, quick!" exclaimed Dick, as the Indians began to utter cries of alarm, and a few warriors ran back for their arms.

The girls dashed in, clothed in picturesque Indian costumes, and glared at our two heroes in the greatest amazement.

The shouts of the Indians grew louder and fiercer, and a few rifle-shots were heard. Bullets rattled against the side of the car.

"Are they all here?" Frank asked of Morgan.

"Yes—all safe," replied Morgan.

He blew a fierce blast on the whistle and started off. The girls were frightened at first, but Morgan quieted them in a moment.

"Girls, we are free!" he cried, gathering his sister in his arms and pressing her to his heart.

They burst into tears and wept for joy, smiling through their tears at the brave young man who had rescued them from a fate worse than death.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MERRY, MERRY PARTY.

THEY soon dried their tears, however, for joy is seldom killing, and then they looked out on the prairie, over which they were going so fast.

"Oh, they can never, never catch us at this speed!" cried Julia Morgan, a handsome young girl of seventeen.

"Oh, I am so glad!" cried Susie Jones. "I never thought ever to be free again."

"Who made this car to run on the ground without rails?" Julia Morgan asked.

"Frank Reade, Jr.," replied Jack, pointing to the young inventor, "is the inventor and owner."

Julia went up to him and kissed him. Instantly the other four followed.

"Hello!" cried Jack, "don't leave me out. I'm as good-looking as he is."

The girls fairly screamed with laughter, and rushed upon him.

"Oh, we haven't seen any white men in a year," cried Susie Jones, "and we don't know how to behave ourselves. The Indians wouldn't let us kiss Mr. Morgan there, so we had to do without kissing."

They all laughed.

"Come on and make up for lost time," cried Jack. "I never had such sweet kisses in my life."

"No," said Morgan, "it's my turn next."

Julia ran up and kissed her brother, and Susie Jones came next. She hugged him and kissed him a dozen times.

It was plain that Susie loved him; for she was happy and rosy when he let her go. The other girls then kissed him and each other, after which they took each other's hands and danced around like children just out of school.

Big-hearted Pomp looked on with tears in his eyes.

"Tank de good Lord!" he murmured, and then suddenly darted back into the kitchen.

He was gone but a moment, and returned with his old violin, which he had used for ten years.

Oh, golly, how those girls did dance! They flung their tiny feet about only as young, light-hearted girls know how, and danced till they were tired out. The three young men took turns dancing with the girls until all had danced.

"Whoop!" yelled Pomp, jumping up and cutting a "pigeon-wing," ending in a regular old Virginia breakdown.

The young girls laughed till they cried. Their young hearts were so light all of a sudden that they could only dance and laugh and sing.

The Wonder sped over the dead-level till it regained the very spot where they camped the night before. The sun was still three hours high, and they concluded to push on north and camp some fifty miles above.

They made a fine run, and sunset found them on the banks of White River in a grove of cotton-wood trees.

Pomp and the three men took pails and quickly filled the barrels with water.

"It's necessary to keep plenty of water on board," said Frank, "for we couldn't budge an inch if we were to get out of water."

While the men were getting water Julia Morgan and the other girls were busy getting supper ready.

What a splendid set of cooks those girls were! They were all daughters of practical, sensible mothers, who taught them how to cook a good meal on short notice. Such bread and coffee as they made! Such broiled buffalo steaks! Even old Pomp "licked his chops" and muttered:

"Golly, but dat smells powerful good!"

"You are right, Pomp," said Jack. "Women can beat men at that kind of work."

"Yes, sah; dat's er fact. Dey's mighty handy ter hab around, anyhow, Marse Jack."

By the time the barrels were filled Julia Morgan announced supper. A portable adjustable table had been put up, and the camp-stools put around it. They all sat down and ate, talked, cracked jokes, and made merry like a party of young children.

The supper over, they quickly put everything back into the car.

"It's getting dark now," said Frank. "The Indians might slip up and fire on us. In the car

we are safe, and don't have to keep any watch. There we can talk and laugh till bed-time."

They sat up and talked till midnight. The girls had many startling experiences to tell.

At last it was time to retire.

"You girls can take the berths in the other room," said Frank; "and we fellows will roll in our blankets on the floor here."

"I am so sorry you have to do that, Mr. Reade," said Julia Morgan. "I would rather lie on the floor myself."

"But we wouldn't allow that, you know," said he. "You are our guests, and have nothing to say about where you will sleep."

Julia laughed, and said:

"We can only thank you for your kindness, Mr. Reade."

"Oh, don't do that, Miss Morgan. We are so glad that we had the good fortune to get you away from the Indians that we feel thankful to you ladies for it."

The girls then kissed them good-night again, and went into the sleeping-berth part of the car, whilst Jack, Frank, Dick and Pomp rolled on the floor in their blankets.

Nothing disturbed their slumbers during the night, and at sunrise Pomp called them all up to breakfast. He had the tables and stools outdoors again, where they breakfasted in the sunlight as it came through the tall cotton-wood trees.

It was a merry breakfast party, and the silvery laughter of the girls could have been heard at least a quarter of a mile away.

The breakfast over, they prepared to resume their journey, when Dick Morgan remarked:

"Perhaps the girls would prefer to go where they started, Mr. Reade."

"Oh, I forgot about that!" exclaimed Frank. "Certainly, we'll carry them just where they want to go."

"Oh, I've got enough of this country!" exclaimed Julia Morgan. "I don't want to go any further West."

"Nor I—nor I!" echoed all the others.

"Where do you wish to go, then?" he asked.

"East—take us East; we can find employment or husbands in our old homes."

"Oh, as to that you had better go to Readestown, where I live," said Frank. "You'll find husbands there without any trouble, as pretty girls are scarce there."

They laughed and whispered together several minutes, and then the fair Julia said:

"As all our people are dead except some distant relatives, we have concluded to go to Readestown and see if we cannot find employment there."

"Very sensible. I am glad you have done so. I am sure you can find homes there, and—"

"Look dar!" cried Pomp, springing up, and pointing to a band of Indians on horseback riding furiously down upon them.

"Get inside, quick!" cried Frank.

In just one minute they were inside, and all the fastenings secured.

"Get your rifles ready."

Four repeating rifles were taken down and made ready for service.

The Indians rode up alongside the Wonder, and seeing Frank at the window, the chief said:

"How!"

"How do?" greeted Frank.

"Heap wagon," said the chief, looking at the Wonder with a great deal of interest.

"Yes, but we have heap horse, too," returned Frank.

"Where hoss—me no see hoss?"

"Oh, that's our horse," remarked Frank, pointing to the engine.

"Ugh! white man joke; where go?"

"Going home—up north," he replied.

"Better stay—want you -want wagon, too."

"Can't stay, haven't got time."

"Must stay," and then at a signal the whole band dismounted and surrounded the Wonder.

"Me got you now!" cried the chief.

"Have you? Come inside, then."

The chief came in as Jack opened the door. Pomp and Dick seized and disarmed him, whilst Jack closed the door.

Frank pulled the whistle valve.

A fierce whistle scattered them like a bombshell, and then the Wonder shot ahead like a race-horse, leaving the dumfounded Indians far behind on foot, as the steam whistle had scattered their horses like chaff before a strong wind.

Pomp and Dick had bound the chief and kept him down till the Wonder had carried him several miles away from his warriors.

"Now, shear his head," ordered Frank; and Pomp seized his shears and went to work on his shock of coarse black hair. In ten minutes the proud chief was nothing but a disgraced, bald-headed Indian.

"Kick him out, now; he hasn't any friends," said Jack, laughing; and forthwith Dick, Pomp,

Jack and Frank fell to kicking him. They raised him at every kick, till at last Pomp's brogan sent him flying through the open door of the car, landing him on the grass outside.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HERD OF BUFFALO—A TERRIBLE DANGER.

DURING the time the Indian chief was in the car the girls kept concealed in the little kitchen apartment, fearing to let him see them. They had a perfect horror of the red-skins, and did not wish to look upon their like again.

But they could hear all that was said or done, hence, when they heard them kicking the bald-headed red man out of the car they ran in and joined in the general laughter. Oh, it was sweet revenge to them, for to lose his scalp-lock is the lowest depth an Indian can reach!

"His people will drive him out of the village when he returns," said Susie Jones.

"Oh, he won't dare return till his hair grows out again," said Julia Morgan. "I am almost sorry you didn't take his scalp off with his hair."

"I don't want to hurt them," said Frank, "unless compelled to in self-defense."

"Well, they won't be so considerate with you, if they once get you in their power."

"Oh, I know that well enough, and that's why I never take any chances with them."

"They ought not to be treated as human beings," said Susie Jones. "They haven't as much mercy as the wolves have."

"I believe you, Sue," said Dick. "I was forced to witness some of their atrocities and pretend to delight in them. I know that among the braves in the village we left yesterday, not one is innocent of the most unprovoked murder. To flay them alive would be no more than they deserved."

"Yes—that would not be all they deserve. I don't see why the government allows them to live and roam about as they do."

"Some day the people of the border will organize and sweep them off the face of the earth," said Dick Morgan. "They are devils incarnate."

"He's making his way toward the timber," said Jack, who was watching the Indian whose looks had been sheared.

"And evidently trying to dodge his companions," remarked Frank.

"Oh, the others are so busy trying to catch their horses which the whistle scattered, that they don't seem to take any notice of him."

"I've a mind to run back down there, and scatter them, too."

"Oh, they'd take to the timber and fire on us."

"Don't go, please," pleaded Julia Morgan. "Please go as far away from them as you can."

"To please you I will," said Frank, turning to the engine, and starting it again.

The Wonder moved along over the level plain as smoothly as skating, giving the red-skins a parting whistle as they went.

Faster and faster it went, the addition of six more persons to the load apparently making no difference in the speed.

The girls threw up the blinds, raised the windows, and drank in the fresh air as they sped along. Every now and then a long-eared jackass-rabbit would spring up and scud across the prairie in a terror of fright at the Wonder. The girls would scream and laugh as the timid creatures sped away.

It is said that a well scared jackass-rabbit can outrun anything in the animal kingdom. Rifle-men have never been known to kill one whilst running from him. They are said to outrun the bullets.

In another half hour they were out of sight of the Indians. The girls felt free and happy once more, and sang joyously as they sped along.

"Buffalo! Buffalo!" cried Pomp, who was out on the engine.

"Where?" cried Jack.

"Straight ahead!" returned Pomp.

Frank got his spy-glass and looked in the direction Pomp had indicated.

"Why, you black truth-killer!" exclaimed Frank. "Those are not buffalo!"

"What am dey, den?"

"Hanged if I know."

"Dat's what I know," chuckled Pomp. "I know dem black spots. Dey's buffalo, suah."

"If they are your eyes are better than this spy-glass."

"Go long wid yer ole spy-glass," said Pomp. "My two eyes am better den all de spy-glasses in de worl', Marse Frank. Wait til ye gits dar, an' yer'll see lots er buffalo."

The girls crowded forward, anxious to get a glimpse at the huge, shaggy monsters. But as yet only a few small black specks in the horizon could be seen.

"Are those little black specks buffaloes," Susie Jones asked.

"Yes, missus—dem's buffalo," replied Pomp, as confidently as if he was in the midst of them.

By and by the Wonder drew nearer, and the black specks began to assume certain shapes. At first they appeared to be hogs, then small calves, and at last the grim, shaggy monsters loomed up in full view. There were thousands of them, stretched away for miles, quietly browsing on the rich, succulent grass of the plains.

The bellowing of so many thousands made a noise similar to the roar of the ocean, and the sight and sounds caused the entire party to cease their levity and gaze upon the vast herd in awe.

"There must be a million of them," said Jack.

"There may be two millions," said Frank.

"No man could count them. They are going southward. We will have to turn aside to get out of their way."

"Wouldn't they get out of our way?" Julia Morgan asked.

"Indeed, no," said Pomp. "Dem buffalo is more dangerous den all de Injuns in de worl', missy."

"Why, Pomp?"

"Dat's er fac', missy. S'pose dem buffalo git skeered at somefing way back dar. Dey come rushin' down dis way, an' de debil would be er goner ef he didn't ran faster den dey did."

"Pomp is right," said Frank; "I've heard my father say the same thing, many a time, and I've read of it, too."

"So have I," said Jack.

"Me, too," added Dick. "I wish we were in the rear instead of the front of this herd."

As far as the eye could reach to the fight, front and left of them, the horizon was black with the moving monsters. They were moving down on either side of the Wonder. Many came within ten paces of the car; but no one dared shoot at them.

"I must turn round and get away from here," said Frank. "This is the most serious danger we have met with yet;" and starting the Wonder, he commenced slowly and cautiously to make a circuit.

"Look out dar!" called out Pomp; "don't run agin um, Marse Frank. One ob dem big bulls turn yer ober, an' den dey be goners."

The Wonder grazed several, but the grim monsters did not notice it, as there were so many around them.

At last the Wonder was completely turned. Frank put on a full head of steam, and sped away as fast as they could go.

"We must get round on their right, and then attack them," remarked Frank.

An hour's run brought them to the river, and, to their dismay, they saw that the herd reached the timber also.

"My God!" gasped Frank, suddenly realizing the danger of the situation; "we'll have to run for it!"

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp, soberly as a parson, "an' yer's got ter run mighty fast, too, Marse Frank, 'case dem buffaloes am er comin' faster an' faster all de time."

It was true. The main body pressing those near the timber too closely, caused thousands to make a rush to get ahead; that started others, and thus a stampede commenced.

Frank turned southward, and made good speed, the black herd coming after him as if in hot pursuit.

Away went the Wonder, gaining a mile in every three or four, till at last they were a considerable distance in advance of the herd.

"Why, we are going right back to the village!" cried Julia Morgan, in great alarm.

"So we are," said Jack; "but there is no danger whatever from that quarter; the danger is all behind us in that herd."

"Dat's er fac', Marse Jack; dem Injuns ain't nothin'." It's dem buffalo dat makes me skeered."

"The Indians will run as fast as they can when they see them coming," said Dick; "they fear them as much as we do."

"But how are we going to get away from them?" Julia Morgan asked.

"Run away from them!" replied Jack. "They can't run all over creation, and we can."

The herd kept coming faster and faster, the roar of the thousands sounding like distant thunder.

As mile after mile was passed, and the Wonder gained steadily in distance, yet our heroes knew the dangerous foe was still behind them.

That afternoon they found the river making a sudden bend, which compelled them to return and make a dash through the village they had rescued the girls from.

The women and children were astounded at another visit from the Wonder, and ran out to see it. But in a couple of minutes it had passed

through, going southward as fast as steam could take it.

"Night is coming on," said Frank, "and we are not yet out of their way. Light the head-light, Pomp, and we'll make a break for the other side of the herd."

Pomp soon had the light burning brightly, and then Frank struck across the pathway of the coming herd.

Darkness came on, and the brilliant light threw its rays several hundred yards in advance of the Wonder. The roar of the herd could now be heard plainer.

Suddenly two buffaloes were seen to dart across the path of light, hurrying southward.

"My God," gasped Frank, "if we should strike some of them all would be lost!"

Another and another darted across, and then—crash! went the engine against a huge bull, throwing every one in the car to the floor.

CHAPTER X.

A WILD RUSH OF BUFFALOES.

THE shock was a terrific one.

It threw every one to the floor of the car. The girls screamed with terror.

Pomp fell on his knees and began to pray. That is a negro's last resort when death stares him in the face.

His example was extremely demoralizing on the girls, as they then thought death was at hand.

Frank was too much stunned at first to know what to do. But he soon recovered, to find that the Wonder was still moving along rapidly.

It had knocked the buffalo out of the way, and kept on its course.

"How unfortunate the buffalo did not get under the wheels!" he said to himself as he saw several other shaggy monsters dash across the ray of light. Then, thinking it less dangerous, he slowed up and made more moderate speed.

The girls kept screaming, and Pomp kept praying, till at last Frank cried out:

"Hush that noise. We are going along all right!"

Julia Morgan sprang to his side, and asked:

"Are we safe?"

"We are alive yet," he replied, "and while there is life there is hope."

"Yes—yes—I won't despair. I thought we were all killed, or about to be."

"Please quiet the other girls, and tell them to wait for the funeral before they begin to weep," and, turning to Pomp, he dashed a cup of cold water in his face.

"Get up, Pomp, and be ready for the next one!"

Pomp sprang to his feet and glared around as if uncertain where he was. He saw that the Wonder was moving along smoothly, and that Frank was looking ahead for danger.

The roar of the rushing herd was simply awful. Frank could not hear what was said unless the speaker raised his or her voice to the highest pitch. But he could tell by the sound that the main body of the herd was passing behind him—that those that shot across his path in front were merely stragglers.

"We are safe," he said, "if we can get three miles further without any accident."

He held the Wonder firmly to her course, and in another half hour the roar was behind him.

"Saved!" he cried, stopping the engine and dropping into a seat. "The danger is passed."

Jack called to the two girls and repeated his words. There was a general rejoicing among them, for they had expected nothing but a horrible death after experiencing the shock of the collision. They could scarcely realize that they were out of danger.

"Now, Pomp," said Frank, "I've just found out that I am hungry. I guess all the rest are the same way. Cook some of that buffalo steak. I could eat a pound or two of it, I think."

"So could I," said Jack.

Pomp got up and went back into the kitchen, where he at once began preparations for supper.

In another hour he announced that it was ready. As the kitchen was too small to hold them all it was brought out to them, and they ate it in the main room of the car.

The roar of the rushing herd still rang in their ears when they retired. But when they awoke at daylight not a buffalo was in sight. The ground as far as the eye could reach looked as if a sirocco of fire had swept over it.

Not a blade of grass was visible in the path of the herd where the main body passed.

"We made a narrow escape," said Jack, shaking his head.

"Yes," replied Frank. "Had we been caught in that rush we would have been ground to dust."

"Oh, it was awful," exclaimed Julia Morgan,

as she gazed over the scene. "I shall never forget the horrors of yesterday and last night." "Neither will I," added Susie Jones. "I never slept a wink all night."

"There must have been a million of them," remarked Jack.

"And thousands upon thousands were drowned where they crossed the river. The river must have been choked with them."

"Yes—it must have been awful. I wish we could follow their trail and see the result at the river."

"There's nothing to hinder except the ladies," replied Frank. "They may not wish to follow it up."

"Oh, indeed we would if you gentlemen wish to go," said Julia Morgan, speaking for the girls, "and think there is no danger."

"Oh, there is no danger as long as we are behind the herd. It's the front of the herd I fear."

"Then we girls are in no hurry," said Julia. "Are we, girls, as long as we have such kind friends?"

"Oh, no. We would be delighted," said they all.

"Then we will follow them as far as the river," said Frank.

Pomp soon had breakfast ready, and then the Wonder was turned in the direction the buffaloes had gone.

"Youse don't do much tinkin', Marse Frank," said Pomp, as soon as he found out which way they were going.

"What's the matter now, Pomp?" Frank asked, seeing that something was weighing on the old darkey's mind.

"Injuns," was the sententious reply.

"Well, what about Indians?"

"Dey allers follow de buffalo."

"What?"

"Dey allers follow dem buffalo. Dere'll be a heap ob 'em down dar by de ribber."

"Oh, yes, I understand you now," said Frank. "But they can't hurt us. We have nothing to fear from them."

"Better not fool wid 'em," and Pomp shook his woolly head deprecatingly.

"Oh, we won't bother them if they won't bother us," he said, laughing. "Don't let that trouble you, Pomp. The Wonder is master of the situation."

The Wonder pushed on at a rattling pace, and soon many dead buffaloes were seen here and there, having stumbled and fallen to be run over and killed by those behind them. To stumble and fall in a rush like that was sure death.

Suddenly one of the girls sang out:

"Indians! Indians!"

Away off on the outskirts of the great trail, a party of Indians were seen following after a few straggling buffaloes.

"Never mind them," said Frank, on looking at them through his spy-glass. "They are too busy now to try to meddle with other people."

The Wonder pushed on steadily, and soon came in sight of many straggling buffaloes. They ran alongside of several, and brought them down with their repeating rifles.

Other bands of Indians came into view, until over one hundred were in sight. The presence of the Wonder seemed to astonish them beyond measure. They made a rush for it, and whooped and yelled like so many lunatics.

Frank closed the steel blinds so no stray bullet could harm any one inside, and kept on his way as though no Indian was in sight.

A chief rode up alongside of the car, and called out:

"Big wagon, stop! Me great chief. Me talk to big wagon."

"Well, what do you want?" Frank asked, not daring to raise the blinds.

"Me want to talk."

"Well, talk away."

"Who you?"

"We are white men hunting the buffalo," replied Frank. "We are friends of the red man, and don't want any trouble with him. You go on and kill all the game you can and we'll do the same thing."

"White man must stop," said the savage.

"I won't do it. This is a free country. Go your way and I'll go mine."

The Indian gave a whoop, and one hundred warriors answered it. Frank blew the whistle and the Indian ponies scattered in terror.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIGHT ON THE BUFFALO TRAIL.

THOSE in the car laughed heartily when they saw the many cases the riders were as much demoralized as the ponies were, but in a few minutes some two score rallied, and commenced firing at the Wonder.

Of course their bullets flattened against the sides of the car and fell to the ground. But Frank was angry at the unprovoked attack.

"Three of you take good aim and drop three of those fellows," he said to Jack.

Jack, Dick and Pomp took good aim and fired. Three Indians tumbled to the ground.

"Three more!" cried Frank.

Crack! crack! crack!

Three more went down.

Crack! crack! crack!

They were good marksmen, and every shot counted.

Nine Indians were down.

That was getting serious.

They yelled and charged upon the Wonder, as if expecting to be able to take it by overwhelming numbers.

Frank turned on a full head of steam, and the Wonder dashed away from them like a bird, yet keeping them in range for the deadly rifles.

"I'll spoil their buffalo hunt for this," said Frank. "Now blaze away just as long as you can bring down one."

The three repeating-rifles did fearful execution, and in a few minutes the Indians were heartily sick of the affair and drew off.

"Oh, you don't get away so easily!" cried Jack. "Turn round on 'em, Frank!"

The Wonder now turned and became the pursuer.

The terrified savages now put their ponies to their full speed. But the poor animals had been following the herd until they were almost fagged out. They made poor runs, and the villainous red-skins dropped rapidly under the fire of the repeating-rifles.

At last they became utterly demoralized and scattered in every direction.

Frank sent the Wonder around in circles, and many were brought down that way. The circles were widened at each round, so they managed to keep up with them. The grass being trampled down they could not conceal themselves, which fact so demoralized them that they made no resistance, but still ran or rode as they thought they could make the best time.

"Don't spare one of the villains!" cried Frank. "I'll leave 'em some sense, or give 'em all the fight they want."

A few got away, and then Frank concluded they had enough. He turned and made for the herd again.

"That's the worst licking they've had for years," said Dick Morgan. "They won't tackle another 'big wagon' soon, I'm thinking."

"I guess they got enough," said Frank. "I didn't want to hurt any of them, but they would have it. I think they'll let us alone after this."

"I dunno 'bout dat," said old Pomp, shaking his head; "Injuns can't pass a wagon widout hittin' it enny more'n a nigger kin pass a water-mill widout borrowing it."

Jack and Frank roared with merriment at Pomp's plain speech.

"I guess you are right, Pomp," said Frank, "for the Indians have been receiving such lessons at the hands of the whites for the last hundred years, and they don't seem to learn anything by it."

"Dat's er fac', Marse Frank," put in Pomp. "Dem chaps don't learn nuffin' but devilment."

The Wonder pushed on till they came in sight of the river at about sunset. The sight that met their eyes beggars description.

It was not a large river, and scarcely deep enough to swim a full-grown buffalo. It was literally choked up with dead buffaloes as far as the eye could reach. The water was overflowing the banks on either side, and spreading out over the level country.

"By George?" exclaimed Frank, as he gazed at the holocaust, "there's a fortune in buffalo-robbs if one could only gather and cure them."

"Yes, but there'd be a pestilence here in a fortnight," said Jack.

"But one could make a fortune in buffalo-hides in that time," put in Dick Morgan.

"It's perfectly awful!" said Julia Morgan, with a shudder.

"I think so too," said Frank, "and I guess we had better move up-stream till we get above this dam of buffalo meat."

The Wonder was turned up-stream, and an hour's run carried them above the dam. There they refilled the casks with water, cooked and ate supper, and then went to bed.

The next morning they were up before sunrise. The scene was the same as the evening before.

"Let's get away from here as fast as we can," said Frank. "It's too horrible to look at."

The Wonder was soon on its way north again, and the young ladies were happy again. The only thing that had to be guarded against were dead buffaloes scattered about the line of their

rush. By keeping a steady lookout ahead they managed to avoid them.

Late in the afternoon they passed the spot where the Indian village had stood. Not a shred of it remained. Everything was swept bare. The main body of the herd had passed over it.

"Wiped out completely!" said Jack.

Julia Morgan shuddered.

"It's terrible to think about," she said. "A whole village destroyed so utterly that not a single trace of it can be found! I never dreamed that the bison were so terribly dangerous."

"I had read of such things," said Jack, "but I never dreamed of its terrible reality."

"Nor I, either," said one of the young ladies.

The Wonder passed the site of the late village, and moved on up the right bank of the river.

That night they camped on the edge of the timber, and were eating supper, when they were startled by a hoarse:

"Hello, stranger!"

"Hello yourself!" returned Frank.

Two white men, bushy-bearded and red-shirted, rode up and dismounted by the fire.

"Glad ter see yer," said the taller of the two strangers, advancing toward the party. "Didn't expect ter see any whites down hyer."

"How came you down here, mister?" Frank asked.

"Oh, pard and me war goin' across the country, when we seed yer mershine. What in blue blazes is it, anyhow?"

"It's a steam carriage, or car," replied Frank, "which takes us wherever we want to go."

"Hang me if that don't beat all creation!" exclaimed one of the new-comers; "an' yer can take yer sweethearts along with yer?"

"Oh, yes," and the party smiled good-naturedly.

"Wal, you fellows have got a nice thing of it. Yer don't want no more company now, do yer?"

"No—haven't room for any more," replied Frank.

The man scowled fiercely and seated himself by the fire. Frank saw at once that he was a bad customer—probably an outlaw—and that both were armed to the teeth.

"I beg your pardon," said Frank. "I meant that we had no room in the car. There's plenty of room here—in the camp—and plenty to eat. Won't you have some supper with us?"

"Yes—stranger. We are hungry as coyotes, an' no mistake," and they both proceeded to help themselves to the buffalo steaks. Pomp proceeded to cook more, knowing from experience that plainmen have good appetites.

After supper the girls went into the car and proceeded to make themselves comfortable. Frank, Jack, Dick and Pomp remained outside, armed to the teeth, till quite late, keeping up a running conversation with the two strangers.

When bed-time came, Frank bade them good-night and went into the car, followed by the others.

"They are outlaws," said Jack.

"So I think," said Frank. "I am almost tempted to get up steam and leave them. A run of ten miles would put us out of their way."

"Do so. I'd rather have a hundred Indians around us than those two men."

Frank applied the match to the furnace fire, and in ten minutes they had steam enough.

Without a word uttered, the Wonder suddenly started off at a brisk pace, leaving the two men sitting at the camp-fire.

But when the two strangers saw the Wonder leaving them, they sprang up and yelled:

"Hold on thar! Hold on, I say! What in blazes are yer creepin' away like that for? Hold up!"

But the Wonder did not "hold up," but went faster and faster each moment, till, in a few minutes, they were out of sight.

Jack and Frank could see the light of the camp-fire they were leaving for a considerable distance; but even that finally faded out of view, and then they could see nothing but the stars overhead.

CHAPTER XII.

RESCUING A WAGON-TRAIN.

AFTER a run of an hour or so the Wonder stopped in the edge of the timber, and all hands went to bed, feeling that no enemy could reach them.

They slept soundly till sunrise, and then woke to find the two red-shirted intruders coming up, they having followed the train as soon as they could see it.

"Hello!" cried the taller of the two men.

"Hello!" returned Jack.

"Let us in, won't yer?"

"No."

"Whv?"

"Don't know you—don't want you!"
 "The thunder you don't!"
 "Yes—don't want you."
 "That's cool, stranger."
 "We are a cool set."
 "Come outside an' say that."
 "Oh, no—we are too cool for that."
 "Too cowardly!"
 "See here, my good fellow," said Frank, speaking with considerable energy, "we can wipe you out so quick you'd think lightning did it. Go away now, before we are tempted to do it. You must be escaped lunatics."

"Show yer head, pard—show yer head!" yelled the man, and running under the window, through the steel blinds of which Frank was speaking, "and I'll blow it off for yer!"

The blind was suddenly thrown open, and a stream of boiling hot water poured into his face. He yelled bloody murder, fired his revolver in the air, and rolled over on the ground.

The Wonder started off at the same instant, and by the time the scalded outlaw scrambled to his feet it was a half mile away, scudding along at the rate of twelve or fifteen miles an hour.

The two villainous wretches were left behind, and in a half hour were out of sight.

"That's the last of them," said Frank. "They'll be one hundred and fifty miles away by sunset."

"I hope we'll never see them again," said Julia Morgan. "They are bad men."

"Undoubtedly. I don't think you'll ever see them again."

"I hope not."

The day passed without anything unusual happening, and night found them again by the same stream, though it was now a mere branch or creek.

"We'll turn it early to-morrow," said Jack, in talking to one of the girls.

"Then we will start straight for Readestown, will we?" she asked.

"Yes, I believe so."

"I am almost sorry, for we are all having such a pleasant time together."

"So am I," he said. "But it is too dangerous to carry so many pretty girls about the country this way. Some accident might happen, you know. We fellows can get along in that case, while you girls could not."

Pomp went up on the top of the car after meat (he was curing the buffalo meat up there), and called out:

"I see de tops of wagons out dere." He pointed in the direction the Wonder had been traveling all day. Jack and Frank went up to get a view from there. The spy-glass revealed the white tops of five wagons in the distance.

"Yes," said Frank. "There are five of them."

"Shall we go out and see them?"

"Yes—after supper."

They then went leisurely about getting supper, whilst Frank looked at his compass to get the bearing of the wagons.

The meal over, the stars were out, and the Wonder moved gently along in the direction of the wagons.

The head-light threw a bright ray several hundred yards ahead, which enabled them to see everything as they went along.

After an hour's run they came in sight of the wagons, but, to their surprise, they saw gunshot flashes and heard gunshot reports.

"Why, hang me if the red-skins ain't after them!" exclaimed Frank. "Get your guns ready, boys!"

Jack, Dick and Pomp got their repeating-rifles ready, and Frank turned on a full head of steam. The Wonder dashed forward at a double speed, and soon they could hear the shouts of the combatants.

Suddenly the Indians were brought into view by the bright light of the reflector. Jack and the other two opened fire on them, and several tumbled from their ponies in a few minutes.

There was a large party of them, but the continuous fire from the three repeating-rifles soon sent them scattering. The Wonder pursued, the light bringing them into view whichever way they turned, for Frank had arranged it so he could turn it to the right or left at will.

"Don't let one escape that you can bring down," said Frank.

The three rifles were kept busy for a few minutes longer, after which time not an Indian could be seen. They couldn't imagine what kind of a monster it was that had come down upon them, and so those who could had slipped away in the darkness.

"Hello, there!" called Frank to the wagon-train.

"Hello!" came back again.

"All right, are you?"

"I dunno! Come in, pard."

Frank turned and steamed up alongside the wagons.

He found it to be the same train whose guide had so unceremoniously ordered the Wonder away the week before.

The old guide came forward now, and said: "Shake, pard, an' forgit what an onnery cuss I am. Yer've saved the train, an' I'm the galoot that's honest enough ter say so. Come out an' stop with us."

The old guide had reached his horny hand through the open window, and shaken hands with Frank.

"Oh, that's all right, pard," said Frank. "Of course we'll come out," and the whole party—girls included—came out and mingled with the emigrants. They found that one man had been killed and four wounded by the Indians.

The joyous reception they received delighted them, so they concluded to spend the night there with them. They helped dig the grave and bury the poor fellow who had been killed, after which they told the story of the rescue of the five girls, and the subsequent destruction of the Indian village, by the herd of buffalo.

The women of the train were never tired of listening to the story of the girls, who had been captives for a year among the red demons, and the girls were never tired of telling it.

It was a very late hour when they retired to sleep, but they slept well and were up by sunrise, looking as fresh and lively as if they were in a splendid home, surrounded by all the comforts of life.

They all ate breakfast together, the Wonder furnishing the meat, and the wagons the bread.

"I can give you plenty of meat if you want it," said Frank.

"Our meat is short, pard," said the old guide. "Well, we'll go hunting for you to-day, and kill a few buffalo. We can run 'em down, you see, and kill as many as we want."

"Which we can't do," said the guide.

Before the meal was over several buffaloes were seen in the distance, and, in a little while, the Wonder was after them. Two hours later four were killed, and their hind-quarters brought into camp, to the great delight of the emigrants, who had been living for weeks on salt meats.

The thanks of the whole party were showered on them.

"Yer don't know how much we owe yer, pard," said the old guide, wringing Frank's hand; "you've saved us from the red-skins, an' then from starvin'."

"Well, I'm glad I did, pard. You would have done the same for me or anybody else."

"Yes; blow me dead if I wouldn't!"

"That makes us even, then."

At about noon the Wonder bade adieu to the wagons, and returned to the route it was pursuing the day before. In another hour the wagons were out of sight.

Late that evening the Wonder turned the headwaters of the stream, and sped away north-eastward, night overtaking them in the open prairie.

They sat up and talked till bed-time, and then retired to sleep and dream. The young ladies dreamed of the pleasures of civilization, and their hearts fluttered at the thought that in a few more days they would be in the midst of civilized people again, where their past sufferings would make every one their friend.

Some time after midnight Jack thought he heard several large animals rush past the Wonder. Soon it became more frequent, and he got up to see what it meant, fearing another rush of buffaloes. As he raised the window, he was astounded at seeing the whole heavens ablaze in a red glare.

"My God!" he gasped, "the world is on fire!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WONDER PLUNGES INTO A SEA OF FIRE.

The sudden exclamation of Jack aroused all the sleepers in the car. They all sprang up and made inquiries as to what the trouble was.

Pomp was the next one to get to the window, and the first glimpse of the broad glare told him but too plainly that the prairie was on fire.

"De Lord sabe us!" he ejaculated. "De prairie is burnin' up!"

"Good Lord!" gasped Frank, springing to the nearest window and throwing up the blinds, "this is the worst danger of all!"

"What is it? What is it?" cried Julia Morgan, from the sleeping-apartment of the car.

"The prairie is on fire!" replied Frank. "You ladies had better get up and dress, as we will have to make a hard run."

Several feminine screams were heard, but in the general excitement no notice was taken of them.

They were not fashionable young ladies who took an hour to dress. On the contrary, they

were all dressed inside of five minutes and in the main room with the boys.

"Pomp!" cried Frank, "light the furnace, quick, and see how much water there is in the tank."

"Yes, sah!" and the old darkey at once set himself to his task. He applied a match to the wicks in the furnace, and in an instant they were ablaze, giving an intense heat to the boiler just above it.

A few minutes later he reported two casks full of water, with the boiler half full.

"That'll be enough," said Jack, as Frank was busy watching the approach of the flames, which now came into full view.

The girls gazed at the coming danger with blanched faces. The flames seemed to fairly leap and dance with demoniacal joy as they approached the Wonder. Great tongues of fire twisted and turned, reached out and took new laps at the tall, waving grass.

"Oh, we are lost!" moaned Susie Jones, wringing her hands.

"We will all be burnt to cinders!" cried Julia Morgan.

"I think we will get through," said Frank, after a careful survey of the situation.

"How in the world can we?" demanded Dick Morgan.

"The Wonder is fire-proof, you know," replied Frank.

"But iron can get hot, you know," said Dick. "It would get hot enough to roast us."

"I don't think so," replied Frank. "Prairie grass doesn't burn long. We can run through the fire and come out on the other side."

"My God!" gasped Jack Russell. "Do you mean to ride right into that blaze?"

"Why not? We can't get away from it."

"Why, those animals are getting away!"

"But those animals can swim the river when they strike it, and the Wonder cannot."

"But we can leave the Wonder, and wade into the water ourselves," argued Jack.

"Only to be smothered to death with smoke," said Frank. "No, our safest plan is to dash through the flames to the other side. A dash of a mile, which will not take us over three or four minutes, would put us behind that wall of flames."

"But if some accident were to happen and leave us right in the midst of the flames?" Julia Morgan asked. "What would be the result?"

"Oh, we'd be baked nice and brown," said Dick.

"We'd only get a good warming," said Frank, smiling in spite of the gravity of the situation.

In the meantime the flames came leaping on at a fearful pace.

"I don't think there is so much danger," said Dick Morgan. "I remember hearing several Indians telling about how Kit Carson once saved his life, by killing his horse, cutting him open, getting inside of him, and staying there until the flames passed over him."

"And it didn't burn him?" one of the young girls asked.

"No—it baked the horse pretty well, but he came out unhurt."

"Oh, there's no use talking about it," said Frank: "it's our only chance, and I am going through."

The others looked desperate, but Julia Morgan walked up to Frank, laid her hand in his, and said:

"You have saved us twice, Mr. Reade. I will trust you as before, and believe in you. If we perish, I will die blessing you with my last breath."

"You are a brave girl, Miss Julia," said Frank. "I would brave death a thousand times to save you."

"Thanks!" and her eyes showed that she appreciated his words.

"Hyer dey come!" cried Pomp, as the coyotes, jack-rabbits, and almost every description of prairie animals dashed past the Wonder toward the river many miles away. The rabbits no longer feared the coyote, and the coyote no longer felt like making a dinner off the rabbit.

The air was filled with prairie fowls flying southward and westward. Any other time the sight would have gladdened the heart of the sportsman. But now sport was not thought of. Life was everything, and that was in danger.

The flames were now only three miles away.

"I'll start now," said Frank, "so as to get a good start for the dash through. Are you all ready?"

"I am," said Julia Morgan, stepping up by his side.

"Close the windows, then."

The windows were closed. Frank pulled the steam handle and the Wonder moved forward, increasing its speed every moment, till a full head of steam sent it dashing along at the rate of eighteen or twenty miles an hour.

One, two, three, five, ten minutes passed, and the Wonder was about to dash through the wall of fire which reared many feet above it.

Julia Morgan gave a shuddering gasp and caught hold of Frank. He passed an arm around her waist, and said:

"Don't be alarmed, there's no danger."

She clung to him all the closer, however, without making any reply.

The next moment the Wonder entered the blaze. It was completely enveloped in flames—fiery, red, hissing flames, that tried in vain to break the thick glass of the car windows for the purpose of getting at the blanched faces inside.

How they hissed!

How they crackled!

How the fiery tongues leaped, twisted, and lapped at the rushing Wonder that thus bravely defied them!

How the wonderful young inventor held his breath as the creation of his brain dashed into the sea of flame!

Julia Morgan, the brave, the beautiful heroine, clung to him and looked up into his face, as the Wonder plunged through the flames, as if to catch the spirit of his own indomitable will.

On, on dashed the car. The daring young engineer held her steadily to her course.

Smoke crept in through every crack and crevice, and gradually filled the car.

The young ladies grew more and more excited.

"Lie down with your faces to the floor!" ordered Frank.

But they did not seem to hear, or hearing, did not understand.

"I will make them lie down," said Julia Morgan, as calmly as Frank had ever seen her.

"Do so," he said, and forthwith she went to them and soon had them all on the floor, where the smoke was not so dense.

Then she came back and stood by the side of Frank, who said:

"Thanks! You are a brave girl."

"I am not afraid as long as you are not," she replied, "because I believe you know what is best."

"Thanks again. I will always try to deserve your confidence."

"On—on plunged the Wonder, and a minute or two later Pomp sung out:

"We're froo de fire! We're froo de fire!"

The girls sprang up, but were almost suffocated with the smoke.

"Lie down! Lie down!" cried Frank. "We are through the fire, but we are yet in the smoke. We'll soon be out of that!"

A brisk wind was blowing, which carried the smoke and fire forward very fast. The dry grass gave but little smoke after the main body of the flames had swept over them.

Ten minutes after passing the wall of fire Jack and Dick threw open the front and rear doors of the car, and the stiff breeze soon emptied it of all the smoke.

"Glory Hallelujah!" shouted Pomp. "We're done gone froo dat fire!"

"Yes, we are all right now," said Frank.

The girls sprang up and looked about them. The sea of flame was behind them. Here and there around them could be seen small lights, or embers of tufts of grass which slowly burned at the ground.

"Oh, is it possible we got through so easily!" cried Susie Jones, almost overcome with joy.

"Yes," said Julia Morgan, taking her in her arms, "Mr. Reade is a real hero. No other man could have taken us through as he did."

They laughed, cried, and sung their joy, and several kissed Frank in the enthusiasm of the moment. The Wonder plunged along till it reached a part of the plains where no smoke or smell of fire could annoy them, and there stopped to finish the sleep the flames had interrupted.

CHAPTER XIV.

BLACK POMP AS A RAM.

THE Wonder was stopped, and all the party lay down to sleep, knowing well that no enemy was within many miles of that spot, as the all-devouring flames had scattered everything in the animated kingdom.

They slept sweetly, and did not wake up till some time after sunrise.

Then they rose up to look out upon a scorched, blackened earth as far as the eye could reach. Not a sign of life could be seen in any direction. Here and there were the half-charred remains of some animal which failed to make its escape.

"Oh, it was awful!" exclaimed Julia, with a shudder. "I never want to pass through such another ordeal."

"Why, I thought you stood it like an old veteran," said Jack.

"And at the same time I was trembling from head to foot," she replied.

"That was from nervous excitement," said Frank. "I never saw such courage displayed by a lady as that shown by you last night. Why, you actually gave me courage to go on, when otherwise I might have faltered."

Julia blushed, and said:

"But for the manly courage and confidence which I saw in your face and actions, I should have fainted with fear."

"We both aided and sustained each other, then?"

"It would seem so," and then they took a walk over the blackened earth till Pomp should announce breakfast.

Frank enjoyed the companionship of the brave girl during the walk of a half hour, finding her really interesting.

Pretty soon Pomp called all hands to breakfast, and they returned with appetites to do ample justice to the meal.

The breakfast over, Frank examined the Wonder, to see what damage it had received from the fire.

He found the only damage done was in the appearance of the whole turnout. The smoke and heat together had given it a general dingy color—darker in some places than in others.

"I'll have to put on a new coat of paint," he remarked.

"Oh, I wouldn't do that, Mr. Reade," exclaimed Julia Morgan.

"Why not, pray?"

"I would let that smoke remain on there, as a memento of the peril that you had passed through."

"That's a good idea," said Jack. "I didn't know you had so much sentiment, Miss Morgan."

"I didn't know it was sentiment," she replied.

"I was speaking just as I felt."

"And I appreciate that feeling," said Frank.

"I wouldn't repaint the Wonder for anything. It shall just stay as it is, beauty or no beauty."

Julia felt proud that her suggestion had met with such a hearty approbation.

They all climbed aboard again, and Frank took his seat at the engine, to see to the running of the car.

It started off in grand style. The occupants seated themselves near the windows and gazed on upon the scene of the recent terrible event.

The Wonder made a good run during the day, passing many carcasses of animals which had fallen victims of the fire.

They reached the stream on the banks of which the fire had started about sunset.

On the other side the tall grass remained intact.

"How I wish there were more rivers," said Susie Jones, "so these great fires could not extend far."

"They sometimes even leap across rivers," said Frank, "particularly when a high wind prevails."

"I wish I was on the other side," remarked one of the girls. "I love the grass better than this blackened earth."

"So do I," added another.

"So say we all," put in Jack, good-naturedly.

"Well, we'll get over there as soon as we can," said Frank. "We can't swim the Wonder over, you know."

"Oh, this small stream won't extend many miles up, surely," remarked one of the girls.

"About twenty or thirty miles, I guess," said Frank, as he and the other men proceeded to fill the tank and casks with fresh water.

The girls prepared supper.

They spent a pleasant evening fishing in the creek. They caught enough for a hearty breakfast the next morning, which Pomp cleaned and salted before going to bed.

Just a little before daylight the Wonder was attacked by Indians again. They climbed up on top of the car, and danced their hideous wardance, yelling and screeching like so many wild-cats.

Telling the girls to keep quiet, Frank lighted the furnace, and waited for the steam to generate. In some fifteen or twenty minutes the steam was hissing. He gave four or five toots with the steam-whistle, and the red rascals tumbled off the top of the car like turtles rolling off a log. They didn't know what had broken loose.

They scattered to a reasonable distance, and stared at the thing.

Frank and Jack were watching them through the blinds.

Crack, crack! went a couple of rifles, and two bullets flattened against the side of the car.

"Let me get a shot at 'em!" said Dick, taking down one of the repeating rifles.

"No, no!" said Frank. "We'll have some fun

with them as soon as it is light enough for us to see them."

"What are you going to do?"

"Wait and see."

By-and-by the Indians came nearer and nearer, until Frank was ready to give them some boiling water. Taking the small hose-pipe in hand, he told Jack to pull the whistle. As Jack did so Frank turned on the boiling water, and in less than ten seconds a dozen half-naked red-skins were howling with scalded spots all over them.

They whooped and yelled all the more, keeping out of the way and firing shots for nearly an hour after.

By that time the gray dawn afforded light enough for Frank to see how to chase them around. He turned the Wonder upon them, and charged.

Of course they scattered.

One big fellow, who seemed to be the chief of the party, was singled out and run down. It was done in a half hour. His horse was slain, and the rascal stood at bay, expecting nothing but instant death.

The Wonder stopped, and all four sprang out and seized him.

He made no resistance, preserving a dignified silence. They disarmed him.

"What do you mean by shooting at us?" Frank asked.

The savage looked contemptuously down at the youth, and said:

"Me great brave. Me talk to men, not boys!"

"Oh, you are a great brave, are you? Now, I think you are a great fool! Pomp, show him how you can butt."

"What dat yer say, Marse Frank?" demanded Pomp, in evident surprise.

"Show this great brave how you can butt. Father says you can outbutt anything in all the West."

"Oh, golly!" chuckled Pomp, grinning from ear to ear; "I'll butt de foolishness clean outen him, Marse Frank."

"Well, let him have it."

Pomp went up to the tall savage, and said:

"You're a red fool nigger! What fo' yer come foolin' round hyer?"

"Ugh!" grunted the savage.

"Ugh!" grunted Pomp, butting him in the chest, and laying him out like a log on the grass.

Frank, Jack, Dick and the girls fairly roared with merriment as the disgusted savage rose to his feet and glared contemptuously at the woolly head.

"How youse like dat, yer red nigger, eh?" said Pomp.

"Ugh! Black man skunk!"

"Ugh! Black man's er ram!" grunted Pomp, and again he planted that hard head of his against the stalwart red-skin, and again sent him to grass, as though a thunder-bolt had struck him.

The others roared with merriment.

The Indian tried to rise again, and in doing so, he presented a fair mark with his posterior.

Pomp dashed forward and gave him a bump that sent him head first to the ground again. Then, when he arose to his knees again, Pomp bumped him on the head with such force as to knock him senseless for several minutes.

"That was a good one, Pomp!" cried Jack.

"Butt him to a jelly! I'll wager that he has scalped women and children."

"I se de ram what can do it," said Pomp, grinning from ear to ear.

"Give it to him till he asks for quarter," said Frank.

"They will take a great deal before they will do that, however."

"Hy'er's de ram ergin!" cried Pomp, giving him another bump as he essayed to rise to his feet again.

"Let him get on his feet again, Pomp," said Frank.

"Yes, sah. Say, yer red nigger! git up hyer an' show yerself!"

He took the rascal and pulled him to his feet. Then Jack asked him how he felt.

"Ugh! Me feel sick."

"Ugh!" grunted Pomp. "I se gwine ter cure dat. Clar de way dar!"

He was some ten paces behind the savage. He made a run, intending to finish him by a thunder-bolt of a butt.

But the savage had received all he wanted of that kind of work. He leaped aside, and Pomp went by like a rocket, landing on his head some ten or fifteen feet away, his big brogans flying up in the air promiscuously.

The others roared more than ever, and even smile of profound satisfaction played around the Indian's mouth.

Pomp rose to his feet the most astonished looking mope ever seen. But for the bed of grass

into which he had plunged, he would have broken his neck or head.

But he was mad.

He rushed up to the Indian, seized him with both hands, and commenced butting him furiously. The savage tried to get away. He could not.

Whack! Bump! Thud! And he sank down to the ground unconscious under the terrible blows.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WONDER RETURNS TO READESTOWN.

"MEBBE youse won't fool wid er black man no more!" said Pomp, as he stood over the prostrate form of the insensible savage.

"You've done for him, I guess, Pomp," said Jack.

"Hope I hab," said Pomp, feeling of his head where it struck the ground. "Dat Injun ain't got no sense."

"I guess not, now," said Frank, looking down at the battered savage, from whose mouth, nose and ears the red blood was oozing.

During all this time the other Indians, who had been scattered by the charge of the Wonder, had collected together again, and watched the treatment meted out to their chief. They dared not make an attempt at rescue. They dreaded the power of the Wonder.

"Now for the others," said Frank, leading the way to the car.

The party re-entered and the chase recommenced.

The redskins scattered again, but not until a half dozen of them had caught bullets from the repeating-rifles of Jack, Dick, and Pomp.

"That'll do, boys," said Frank. "Maybe they'll be good now, after this."

"Good!" exclaimed Dick Morgan. "I've been a year with them, and the only good Indian I ever saw was a dead one!"

"Maybe you are right, Mr. Morgan," said Frank, "in fact, I believe you; but we haven't got time to fool with 'em any longer to-day."

"The best way to make an Indian good is to kill him," said Dick, with considerable emphasis.

"Dat's er fac'," added Pomp, rubbing his head and back of his neck. "Dey orter kill 'em all, suah. Dey's er bad crowd, dat's er fac'."

The Wonder was now turned homeward again, and all hearts rejoiced that they were fast leaving that part of the great West where crime of every description was so rampant.

"I don't think we will meet with any more Indians now," said Frank, "as we are too far eastward for that. The red rascals are too shrewd to commit any depredations so near the border settlements."

"Oh, I am so glad!" cried Susie Jones, bursting into tears.

Poor girl! She had suffered so much that she could scarcely realize that life could have any charms for her.

That day they made a good run, and camped in the open prairie. They spent the evening in singing, dancing, and story-telling, till a late hour, when they retired to rest.

They were all up at sunrise, ready to resume the journey. Such a happy lot of young people were never seen together.

Every one of the girls assisted in cooking the breakfast, telling the boys to look after the car. Pomp was set to rubbing up the engine, while Frank again examined the joints of the covered machinery.

The young inventor was delighted at finding every screw in place, and every joint free from dust. He oiled every part and closed the covers again.

After breakfast they started off in high spirits, making fast time till high noon, when they caught sight of the two church steeples of Readestown.

"Readstown! Readstown!" cried Pomp. "Tank de Lord, we's home er gin!"

The girls laughed and cried by turns, hugged and kissed each other, and otherwise acted like overjoyed children.

"This is the happiest moment of my life," said Frank, grasping Jack Russell's hand. "To know that we have made so many innocent young hearts glad is enough to satisfy the ambition of any man."

"Yes," said Jack, the tears dimming his bright blue eyes. "You have rescued them from a living death."

"It was a living hell," said Dick Morgan, with great bitterness. "Satan's kingdom can't be any worse."

"Well, it's all over with now."

"I don't know about that," said Dick. "If I get two hundred volunteers, with repeating-

rifles, I intend to go back and kill every Apache that I can find."

"You can get the men, I guess," said Jack.

"If I can, there'll be no more trouble with them in another year."

"Would you kill all?"

"Yes—men, women and children. I would destroy the race altogether. They are born devils, and ought to be wiped out."

"I believe you, Morgan, and, if you can raise the men, I'll agree to transport them across the country. I'd build two more cars for the purpose."

"Thanks. I'll appeal to the people through the press."

The church steeples came into better view as the Wonder neared the town. The white cottages looked so beautiful in the clear sunlight, that even Frank and Jack were charmed, though they had been only two weeks away from them.

When they were within a mile of the town, Frank blew the whistle several times so as to notify the people that they were coming.

They could see men, women and children running out of the houses to welcome them.

"They'll give us a grand reception," said Jack.

"Yes," added Frank, "and when they see the girls and hear their story, they'll carry us on their shoulders."

"Oh, that'll be fun," remarked Jack.

"I don't know what to do," returned Frank, who was as modest as he was brave. "Those big-hearted, red-shirted fellows about the saloon will want to make a big demonstration."

"Well, let them make it. It will be better for the girls and excite sympathy in their behalf."

"Oh, I couldn't help myself if I wanted to," said Frank.

By this time they had reached the outskirts of the village, and entered the main street. The red-shirts commenced yelling and throwing up their slouch hats. Frank slowed up so as to allow the people to walk alongside of the car and shake hands with him.

Everybody knew old Pomp, and in less than five minutes he had told the story of the rescue of the girls from the Apaches. The pretty faces of some of them at the windows excited the most intense enthusiasm.

At last the Wonder drew up in front of Frank Reade, Sr.'s, home. A crowd of over three hundred men, women and children gathered around it.

"Tell us about it, Frank!" cried dozens at once.

Frank came out, leading the girls, and stood on the steps of his father's house, and said:

"We caught Dick Morgan here"—he pointed to Dick—"disguised as an Indian, and were about to wipe him out when he told us why he turned Indian. It was to rescue his young sister and four other girls who were captives in an Apache village. That was enough for us. We made him wash off the paint and dress like a white man again. He then agreed to pilot us to the village where his sister was, and we went there. The Wonder scared the Indians nearly to death, but we got the girls and brought them away. They are the best and prettiest lot of girls I ever saw, and I told them that if they would come to Readestown they would soon find friends, homes and husbands. They have come, and I hope they will find my words true."

The crowd yelled and cheered with the wildest enthusiasm, and scores of red-shirted men, with revolvers in their belts, rushed forward to take the young inventor by the hand. Then they shook hands with the girls, and left ten and twenty-dollar gold pieces in their hands.

Julia Morgan got over \$100, and the others nearly as much.

The red-shirted men of the West are rough and generally on the shoot, but they are tender-hearted for all that, and where women and children are concerned, are ready to spend their last dollar and spill their blood for them.

Susie Jones received three offers of marriage on the spot, and Julia two. They blushed rosy red, and asked to be excused from giving answers then.

"Wait till they are dressed up like ladies," said Jack, "and then you'll all want wives."

The girls were conducted into the house by Mrs. Reade and given two rooms, whilst many other women of the village hastened home to get some articles of clothing for them.

In the meantime Frank and Jack and Dick had been seized by the red-shirts and carried away on their shoulders.

"Hurrah for the whitest boys in the West!" cried a stalwart red-shirt, and they made the welkin ring with their shouts.

CHAPTER XVI.

POMP WINS A MATCH.

THE crowd increased in numbers and enthusi-

asm as they progressed through the streets of the town, bearing the three young men on stalwart shoulders toward "Grand Saloon," three blocks away.

Cheering continued with every step. The red-shirts had found a vent for their pent-up spirits, and determined to blow off at all hazards.

They bore the three young men to the saloon, put them in three chairs on tables, and called for three times three and a tiger, which were given with a will.

"Now, barkeeper," called out a stalwart red-shirt, "here's fifty dollars in the yellow. Set the worth of it in drinks for this crowd in honor of the three whitest boys in the West!"

"Hooray for Bill Perkins!" called out some one in the crowd, and the generous-hearted red-shirt was applauded to the skies.

"Thankee, pards," said Perkins. "Just come up an' take your horns, like little men."

"That we will!" and full three hundred men crowded forward to take their favorite drinks.

"Tell us your yarn, pard?" said Bill Perkins, taking Dick Morgan by the arm and making him rise to his feet.

Dick then commenced, and repeated his story as the reader has already heard it—how, in order to be near to aid his sister in captivity, he had joined the Indians as a pretended fugitive from justice, and went with them on their marauding excursions.

"They are born fiends," he said, "and ought to be swept from the face of the earth. If I can get two hundred men with arms, I will go back and kill every man, woman, and child of the race I can find!"

Such wild cheering as greeted his proposition! "I'll go with you, pard," cried an old red-shirt in the crowd.

"I too! And I, and I, I, I!" cried half a hundred more, flourishing revolvers above their heads.

"Give me the men," cried Dick, "and the days of the Apaches are numbered!"

"Hyer's yer man! Whoop! Set 'em up agin, Jim!" and an enthusiastic miner threw an ounce of gold on the counter.

Cheers broke forth anew, and the building fairly shook. Wine and cigars were pressed on the three young men, which they took in moderation.

Then they took them on their shoulders in the chairs, and carried them back to the Reade house, where the Wonder was still standing before the gate. They put them down at the door, gave three more cheers, and then returned to the saloons to finish the day in drinking.

Frank Reade, Jr., was the most popular young man in Readestown then, and every new-comer in the town was anxious to make his acquaintance and take him by the hand.

Bill Perkins, the burly red-shirted frontiersman, who first treated the crowd to fifty dollars' worth of drinks, was a typical Western man, rough, but generous, and brave in every sense of the term. He pronounced him the whitest boy he had ever met, and offered to whip any man who said to the contrary.

Of course no man in Readestown dared to contradict him, for Perkins was on the shoot, and had a "private cemetery." His friendship was much sought after by the rough elements that passed through Readestown.

He swore by Frank Reade, Jr., and declared that he would back him against any galoot in the West.

That night there was more liquor drank in Readestown than ever was known before in the history of the place. A party of miners from the Black Hills got hold of Pomp, and made him tell the story of the trip of the Wonder.

His story of the buffalo stampede and the great prairie fire, and the daring rush of the Wonder through the sea of fire, but added to the excitement and the reputation of Frank Reade, Jr.

The story of his butting episode with the Apache chief, in which the Indian was left for dead on the ground, caused them to regard him as something of a hero also.

"Say, Jim," called Bill Perkins to the barkeeper, "bring this son of charcoal a glass of your best whisky. He's my friend—I want everybody to understand that. His skin is black, but his heart is white. There you are, old man, Bill Perkins is looking at you."

"An' I'se lookin' at you, Massa Bill," said Pomp, grinning from ear to ear, as he held up the glass to his thick lips. He drank the liquor like an old veteran, and set down the glass with a smack of his lips that set the crowd in a roar.

"So you butted the Injun, did you?" asked a brawny red-shirt.

"Yes, sah; butted um stiff," replied Pomp. "Ise got er hard head, I is."

"Wal, now, I've got a hard nut myself," said

the man. "I outbuted the oldest ram in Deadwood. I'll bet a gallon of whisky I can outbutt you."

"Whoop!" yelled Bill Perkins. "That's a match. I'll take that bet, and make it a barrel. Put up or shut up."

"My barrel is up," said red-shirt, placing a small leather bag of gold-dust on the counter. "What's a barrel worth, pard?"

"Two hundred dollars," said the barkeeper. Both men planked down two hundred dollars in gold-dust and coin together, the barkeeper holding the stakes.

Pomp was dumfounded. "De Lord gorrमितेय!" he exclaimed. "I ain't got no call ter butt dat man!"

"Yes, you have," said Perkins. "He's good as called yer a liar, and wants to butt with you to show the crowd that you can't butt no more'n a hog."

"Why, Marse Bill, no white man ain't got er nigger head!" said Pomp, in honest innocence, at which the crowd roared.

"Well, go in and win, old man. I'm backing you. The whisky is yours if you win it."

"De whole bar!"

"Yes; every pint of it."

"Whoop! Bring out yer man!" And Pomp flung his coat off with the eagerness of a small boy going for candy.

The butter from Deadwood was a professional "hard head."

But Pomp had confidence in his nut. The ring was formed, and the two men met and shook hands.

"Does yer seedat head?" asked Pomp, bending his woolly head forward for Deadwood to inspect.

"Oh, yes, I see it," was the reply.

"Feel ob it!" said Pomp.

The crowd laughed, and the Deadwood man butted it with a tremendous whack, falling back stone blind for a moment.

"Yi—yi—did youse feel it?" Pomp asked.

The man slowly recovered and got on his feet again.

Pomp met him half-way next time, and sent him all in a heap on the floor, where he lay utterly unconscious for several minutes, unable to respond when time was called.

"The whisky is yours, Pomp," said the barkeeper.

The crowd yelled like so many wild lunatics. They crowded around Pomp and shook his hand as though he were the leader of a hundred battles won.

"I'll back him against any man in the West!" cried Bill Perkins.

"Whoop!" yelled Pomp. "I'se got a whole bar'l o' whisky! I golly! Dis ole head ain't so no account after all. Whoop!" and he danced a regular old plantation breakdown, to the intense amusement of the crowd.

Scores of men pressed forward and insisted on him drinking with them. He tried to do so. The result was he got as drunk as a lord, and offered to butt against a wild buffalo if any one would bring one in.

They took him home, and turned him over to the tender mercies of Frank and Jack. They put him under the pump and turned a stream of cold water on him.

He stood it for some time, as though the cold water were quite refreshing to him. But he finally came to, and mumbled out something about somebody spilling water around.

Jack and Frank laughed heartily until he sobered up enough to understand the racket.

"Hello, Pomp!" cried Frank. "How's this? Are you drunk?"

"Ebberry (hic) body drunk," muttered Pomp.

He didn't miss the mark very far that time, for nearly every man at the saloon was drunk by that time.

The two young men saw that he was unable to talk very intelligibly, so they took him to his room over the stable and put him to bed.

After that they retired to their own quarters to plan a new expedition to the great Southwest.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GREAT AUCTION SALE.

THE next morning Jack and Frank were out by the Wonder, talking over the proposed trip, when Pomp came creeping down the stairs from his room over the stable.

He had a head on him as big as a hoghead. He was mentally calculating how he would manage to drag it through the door, when Jack, who, being a New York boy, knew something about such things, called out:

"Why, Pomp, old man, what in thunder is the matter with your head this morning?"

Pomp stopped, and looked at them. There

was a heaviness about him that gave him away badly.

"I dunno, Marse Jack," he said. "I reckon I done gone an' butted sunthin' las' night. I'sean ole fool nigger, Marse Jack."

"Why, what have you been doing, Pomp? Your head is all swelled up as big as a barrel. You can make a fortune with that head in New York."

Pomp slowly felt of his head, closed his eyes, opened them again, and muttered:

"I'sean ole fool nigger, I is."

"What have you been doing, Pomp?" Frank asked. "Tell us. We won't give you away."

"Marse Frank, is yer got any ob dem sperrits what yer had in dat jug in de keer?" he said, coming up close alongside of the young inventor.

"Yes, I think there is," replied Frank. "Help yourself, if that's what you want."

"Tankee, Marse Frank. Dat's de trouble wid me dis mornin'."

He disappeared in the car, and found the demijohn. Turning it up, he took a long and strong pull at it.

Giving a sigh of supreme satisfaction as he set it down, he returned to the two young men, and frankly confessed his fall of the evening before—of his match, and the winning of the forty-gallon barrel of Bourbon whisky.

"Why, Pomp!" exclaimed Frank, "it will never do in the world for you to own so much liquor!"

"Why not?"

"You'd be a drunkard in less than three months, get fired off the place, and become a drunken tramp, whom nobody would have around."

"Dat's er fac'!" exclaimed Pomp; "but what's I gwine ter do wid it?"

"Sell it for the benefit of the girls in the house. It would be a big thing for you. You would be the best man in Readestown after that."

"Oh, golly, Marse Frank!" exclaimed the delighted darkey, growing bright and lively under the strong drink he had just taken, "dat's de ting! Tell dem I gibs it to 'em."

"Bully for you, Pomp! I'll give you a new suit of clothes for that."

Pomp was delighted, and went about his duties as light-hearted as a child.

Frank and Jack told the girls at the breakfast-table of Pomp's comical match the night before, and of his intention to give the proceeds of the sale of the barrel of whisky to them.

"Ah!" said Frank Reade, Sr., "I see a way to create a sensation, and make that barrel pan out a thousand dollars."

"How, father?"

"Put it up at auction to the highest bidder for the benefit of the girls. Every man will want to chip in and be more generous than that poor old negro, so the barrel will bring a round sum in the end."

"Oh, that's the racket!" cried Jack. "It will be a big thing."

Frank and the girls were delighted. They called Pomp in and thanked him for his generous gift, and explained to him what they intended to do with it.

He expressed his satisfaction, and said he would help work up the excitement.

After breakfast Pomp went down to the saloon with Jack and Frank, and the barrel was delivered to him.

"I ain't gwine fo' ter take it away," he said to the barkeeper.

"Well, what shall I do with it?" the barkeeper asked.

"I'se gwine ter hab er sale fo' de young led-dies."

"The deuce!" exclaimed the astonished barkeeper.

"Yes, sah."

"Well, it'll be the biggest thing ever seen in this town, old bed-rock."

"Dat's er fac'!" said Pomp; at which the others laughed.

"A regular auction for the benefit of the young ladies you brought up with you?"

"Yes," replied Jack.

"That whisky'll bring fifty dollars a gallon, as sure as you live."

"That would be two thousand dollars for the barrel."

"Yes, and it would bring even more than that if you sell it by the gallon."

"Well, we'll sell it by the gallon then," said Frank. "Put up a notice that it will be sold next Tuesday for the benefit of the five young ladies rescued from the Indians."

"Why, pard," said the barkeeper, "that'll make a holiday."

"Well, let's have a holiday, then," returned Frank. "I think the boys would like a blow-out anyhow. I'll have the girls down here in the

car where every man can see them as he bids for the liquor."

The barkeeper put up an elaborate notice, and the first man that read it started out to spread the news. Each red-shirt that heard it caught the inspiration, and commenced working up an enthusiasm that was to last till after the auction.

Black Pomp was recognized as a white man after that, and every red-shirt in town took him by the hand and asked him to drink with him.

Thus they kept the poor fellow about half-seas over during the five days—or until Frank Reade, Sr., interfered to save him.

The day of the sale came. Red-shirts came in from every direction, till there were several hundred great, rough, manly fellows hanging around waiting to get a chance to bid for a gallon of that whisky.

Everybody was out in Sunday clothes. It was a regular holiday.

About two hours before the sale was to commence a delegation of red-shirts waited on the ladies at the Reade house, and asked permission to escort them to the place of sale.

They granted the request, of course, for they could not do otherwise. The committee went away, to return at the proper time, dragging two barouches—each drawn by one hundred red-shirted men—preceded by a wagon drawn by another hundred men, covered with flowers and the barrel of whisky.

"Oh, mercy!" gasped Julia Morgan, "just look at that!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Frank Reade, Sr., his face brightening with pleasure, "our boys are going to do this thing right, young ladies. They are rough fellows, but their hearts are all right every time. Smile on them, and look your prettiest, and you will be glad you did so."

"Oh, Mrs. Reade, won't you go with us?" cried Susie Jones.

"Yes, if you wish it," replied the good matron. They were escorted out, and seated in the barouches, and the procession commenced. The wagon with the whisky preceded them. Black Pomp was seated on top of the barrel, and received as many cheers as the ladies did.

The wildest enthusiasm prevailed all along the line of the procession, which was nearly an hour in reaching the place where the sale was to take place.

Frank Reade, Sr., was selected as the proper person to act as auctioneer.

"Now, gentlemen," said Frank, Sr., "you all know why we are assembled here to-day. You have heard the story of the young ladies—of their captivity among the red-skins, and their rescue by my boy and his companions. You have heard of black Pomp's hard head. To-day we see his tender heart in that barrel of whisky. There's the whisky. Here are the girls, as pretty as the whisky is good. Now how much for the first gallon?"

"Fifty dollars!" roared a dozen voices at once.

"Sixty!"

"Seventy!"

"Eighty!"

"One hundred!"

"One ten!"

"One twenty!"

"One thirty!"

"One fifty!"

"One hundred and fifty dollars," cried the auctioneer, "one fifty—one fifty—do I hear any more? One fifty, and—"

"Two hundred!" cried Bill Perkins.

"Hip—hip—hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Gone to Bill Perkins!" cried Frank, Sr., "one of the whitest men in the West!"

"Here's your rhino!" cried Bill, holding up the amount in gold.

The money was taken amidst the wildest cheers.

"Now, sell it again for the youngest gal in the lot," said Bill, at which the crowd went wild with enthusiasm.

The second sale brought \$250.

Then the sale went on for nearly three hours, by which time the last gallon was sold, the whole bringing over \$3,000.

The sale over, the enthusiastic crowd drew the two barouches around town again, and finally halted in front of Frank Reade, Sr.'s, place.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE GO AGAIN.

"THAT gives you all about \$500 each, girls," said Mrs. Reade—"a small fortune for a young lady nowadays."

"Oh, I am rich!" cried Susie Jones. "I could kiss dear old black Pomp for his hard head!"

"So could I!" chorused the others.

"Well, what are you going to do with your money, girls?" Frank Reade, Sr., asked.

"I am going to buy a farm right here close to Readestown," said Julia Morgan. "My father was a farmer, and I know all about farming."

"You are a sensible girl, Miss Morgan. You won't have to wait long for a mate, I can assure you, unless you are very hard to please."

The other four decided to follow Julia's example.

That evening two of the girls accepted offers of marriage, the ceremonies to take place in a month from that day. All the others received offers, but gave no positive answers.

Pomp received presents from almost everybody, and was, perhaps, the happiest man in the town. Frank, Jr., bought him a handsome suit of clothes according to promise. He swore he would go with him to the ends of the earth and butt every Indian he met.

The safe over with, Frank and Jack began to prepare for another trip to the south-west—clear down into New Mexico.

Bill Perkins wanted to go, but Frank said he would only take Jack and Pomp. Perkins then turned his attention to courting Julia Morgan. Dick was to remain behind and look after the farms of the girls.

The decision arrived at, no time in getting ready was lost. Everything was provided that would be needed on such a trip, and on the morning of the third day after the sale of the barrel of whisky the Wonder left Readestown and pushed southward at the speed of eighteen or twenty miles an hour.

"This is glorious!" exclaimed Jack, as the gallant engine plunged along over the smooth surface of the prairie-land. "I think we'll have even more fun on this trip than we did on the other."

"So do I," assented Frank, "as we know better to manage it than before."

"Dat's er fac," put in Pomp; "an' we ain't afraid of no Injuns dis time."

"I guess not. The red-skins will let us have our own way, I think—that is, those who have seen or heard of us."

That night they encamped nearly two hundred miles south of Readestown. A beautiful full moon gave them light enough to see a long distance around them.

The next morning they were off again before sunrise. By the aid of a fine map and compass they were able to turn the heads of several streams, and thus avoided many miles of useless traveling.

On the second night they stopped at the head of a small stream, where a cold spring bubbled up out of the ground. Tall cotton-wood trees grew around the spring, rendering it a lovely spot.

Pomp got out and went to the spring for water. He saw fresh moose tracks near it, and rightly concluded there were red-skins about.

Dipping his pail full of water, he started to leave when three stalwart savages attacked him with knives, thinking he would make no resistance, but beg for mercy.

But Pomp wasn't that kind of a moke. He knocked one down with the pail, butted the other into a cocked hat, and then faced the third with a defiant look and a revolver in his hand.

"Dead Injun, shuah!" said he, pulling the trigger.

The savage gave a whoop and staggered backward—the bullet having gone clean through him.

The one who had met the water-pail rose to his feet and got the next bullet. He, too, staggered a few feet and fell.

Jack and Frank, hearing the shots, ran out to see what the trouble was, and found Pomp holding the third Indian under the muzzle of his death-dealing revolver.

The savage was utterly amazed at the turn of affairs. He stood looking around like one in a dream.

Frank and Jack quickly disarmed him.

"What did you attack him for?" Frank asked.

"Ugh, me great brave—me fight!" was his reply.

"Well, you shall have all the fight you want, you infernal red coward. There's your man; both of you are unarmed. Go for him."

Pomp grinned, and went at him with that hard nut of his. He knocked a grunt out of him that could have been heard a half mile away.

They waited for him to recover, and then Pomp went for him again. He dropped like a log again, and after that Frank and Jack had to hold him up for Pomp to get a fair whack at him.

Pomp gave him several more thumps, and then they dropped him.

"Let's take 'em away from here if we are going to camp by this spring," suggested Jack.

"Just what I was thinking about," said Frank.

Pomp took up the three bodies and put them in the car. Frank and Jack then entered, and

the Wonder was run out about two miles. The bodies were thrown out, and the Wonder returned to the spring.

The Indians' ponies were found in the timber about a hundred yards below the spring. Pomp cut them loose, and they were free to go where they pleased.

The next morning they took in all the water that they needed, and started off again in fine trim. The fire had swept over a vast extent of territory—some three hundred miles—and left nothing but a blackened and charred look where once waved the tall grass.

But the next day they were out of the burned region, and entered a lovely rolling prairie region again.

Game was plentiful. They spent a whole day hunting, and had splendid success. Buffalo, deer, and all kinds of prairie fowls and birds were slaughtered in great quantities.

Pomp broiled a couple of prairie-hens for supper, which delighted the two hungry boys beyond expression. They had game enough to last them many days if they wanted to keep it. Pomp cured two hind-quarters of buffalo beef, to keep in case of emergency.

That night they were greatly annoyed by wolves, which came around all through the night, howling and barking. The next morning, however, not a wolf could be found.

On the wing again, they found the country more rolling. Sometimes they were down in a valley, and then again on the top of a knoll, from which they could see for miles around.

"I see a column of smoke on the right, out there, Frank," said Jack, about noon.

Frank looked in the direction indicated, and said:

"There's somebody over there. We'll see who they are," and turning the Wonder in that direction, pushed on for an hour or so.

"It's an Indian village," said Jack, as soon as he caught sight of the wigwams.

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, "an' dere's lots on 'em dere, too."

Frank rode right up into the village, and gave the savages such a fright as they had never received before in their lives, by giving several piercing whistles.

They tumbled over each other in their eagerness to get out of the way.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Frank and Jack. "They think Old Nick has come at last."

"I think we'd better move on now, and not let 'em know what it is."

"Go ahead."

Giving another fierce toot, the Wonder dashed away at railroad speed, leaving the untutored savage to wonder what in the name of the Happy Hunting Grounds the old thing was, anyhow.

In a half hour it was out of sight of the village, going southward toward New Mexico.

Suddenly they struck the trail of the New Mexico mail route, and stopped to look at it.

"Hark!" said Frank. "I heard rifle-shots."

"So did I," replied Jack.

Pomp climbed out on top of the car and gazed around.

"By golly!" he exclaimed, "day am fightin' de coach down dar!"

"Where?" cried Frank.

"Ober in de hollow dere."

Frank started the Wonder, and turned it around so as to head for the point indicated.

"Get your rifles ready," he said.

Jack and Pomp got down their repeating-rifles, and stood ready for any emergency.

CHAPTER XIX.

OUR HERO RESCUES A MAIL-STAGE.

THE Wonder had to ascend a knoll for nearly a mile before those inside could see the coach in the bottom a half mile beyond.

"By George!" exclaimed Frank, "they have shot down two of the horses, and are now robbing the passengers!"

"Blow the whistle!" cried Jack.

Frank blew the whistle, and then the Wonder went plunging down the hill at a break-neck speed.

The robbers looked up at the Wonder in dumfounded amazement. They could not believe their senses.

In a few minutes the Wonder was down near them.

Crack! crack! went Jack's and Pomp's rifles, and two of the mail-robbers fell dead in their tracks.

"Surrender!" cried Frank.

There were a dozen robbers.

"Never!" cried the leader.

"All right," cried Frank, and the next moment the leader fell, shot through the body.

Then the others commenced firing at the Won-

der. But the repeating-rifles made such a terrible havoc among them that the survivors—five in number—mounted their horses and tried to get away.

But it was impossible to get away from the Wonder. Frank instantly started in pursuit, and Pomp and Jack did some fine shooting. Not one got away.

When the last one went down the Wonder returned to the coach, where they found two of the four horses dead, one passenger wounded, and the others frightened almost to death.

"Hello, driver!" cried Frank.

"Hello, yourself!" returned the driver. "What in blue blazes are you doing down here with no railroad track?"

"Oh, we are independent of railroads. We don't want any track. How comes it you let them fellows rob your mail and passengers?"

"How the blazes could I help it?"

"Shoot 'em down on sight."

"Wal, I guess you never drove a coach through this country, mister, did yer?"

"No, and never want to. I would not drive a coach nohow."

"Wal, I wouldn't either if I had a turn-out like that," replied the coachman.

By this time Frank, Jack and Pomp had gotten out and gone among the passengers. There were five of them. One was pretty badly wounded.

"Oh, but for you, sir," said an old gentleman, "we would have been robbed and murdered."

"I haven't a doubt of it, sir," replied Frank.

"They were robbing you when we came up."

The wounded passenger was badly off. Frank had him carried into the car and put in one of the berths, where the wound was dressed and brandy given him to quiet his nerves.

"Now, what am I to do with all this mail?" Sam Watson, the stage-driver, asked.

"How far are you from the next station?" Frank asked.

"About twelve or fifteen miles," he replied.

"Throw the mail-bags into the car, and I'll take it through."

"But it can't go unless I go with it, you know."

"Oh, that's all right. Get in with it, of course."

"And we passengers?"

"Get in, all of you."

"The two horses?"

"Tie them behind."

Thus the Wonder took the passengers and the United States mail and started off along the old stage route. But for the two horses they were leading they would have made the distance in one hour. As it was, it took them two hours to make it.

The hands at the station were astounded at seeing such a strange train rush up to the stand.

But when they learned the story of the rescue, and the death of the robbers, their enthusiasm was boundless.

Frank put out the mail and passengers, and then returned for the stage. He found it untouched, and secured it to the car. It interfered but little with the speed of the Wonder, which made the run to the station in one hour.

"By all the horned frogs in Texas," exclaimed Sam Watson, "but that beats all the stages in the world."

"I should say it does," said one of the passengers.

"Why don't the contractor hire it to carry mails and passengers?"

"Never heard of the thing till to-day," replied Sam.

"Can't you get him to take us through?"

"Don't know. I have no authority to do so. Here comes the other stage from below."

The stage from below came up at a run. It was carrying a heavy mail and four passengers.

"Indians are thicker'n prairie dogs below," said the driver of No. 2 to Sam as he alighted to take a drink.

That made Sam look blue. He had had an experience with the Comanches, and had reason to fear them.

"Are they on the war-path, Jake?" he asked.

"No—nothing but plunder and devilry," was the reply.

The passengers appealed to Frank to take them through in the Wonder.

"We will give you one hundred dollars each if you will," said they.

"That's four hundred dollars," said Frank.

"I'll do it, gentlemen."

"It'll be five hundred dollars," said another.

"No," he replied. "It will be a free ride to the wounded passenger."

"Good for you, pard!" cried Sam Watson. "I like your style. Sam Watson is your friend, understand."

"Thank you, Sam," said Frank. "I claim to

be a white man every day. I'll carry you and your mail through though a thousand Indians were in the way."

"Are there any streams to cross?" asked Jack Russell.

"Yes—one river, but the bottom is hard sand, and not over two feet deep. Your engine can cross without any trouble."

"I'd rather not undertake to cross the river," said Frank, shaking his head.

"Go to the river," said Sam, "and if you can't cross it, I'll agree to drown myself."

"All right. All aboard!"

The passengers crowded aboard, and the Wonder started off down the road in fine style, to the intense delight of all about the station.

The next station was made so quick as to utterly astonish Sam Watson.

"By the great hurricane!" he exclaimed. "This beats the world! Horse flesh is played out. Steam stages take the cake!"

They stopped one minute only at the station and then hurried on.

"Indians below—look out!" cried the hands at the station.

"Hang the Indians!" cried Jack. "We don't fear a thousand of them."

Fifteen miles further on they met a band of nearly two hundred Indians, all mounted and in a wild mood. The savages uttered wild yells, and dashed forward to intercept the Wonder.

Frank slowed up, but moved at a five-mile pace, as though he didn't see the savages.

They cried halt a hundred times, and finding that it did no good, commenced trying to overturn it. Frank gave them a stream of scalding water, which came near taking the skin off of a dozen or two of them.

They scattered, howling like demons, and commenced firing at the car.

"Now, give them the contents of the repeating rifles as fast as you can, boys."

Three repeating rifles, carrying sixteen charges each, then opened on them, and the execution was awful. The marksmen were number one, the targets fair, and every ball went home.

Not until some twenty-five or thirty of their number were down did the Comanches realize that they were getting the worst of it.

Then they drew off, making the welkin ring with their yells of defiance.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WONDER DEFENDS THE U. S. MAILS.

WHEN they drew off, the Indians collected in a body about a half mile from the Wonder, to count losses and plan a future attack.

"Now is our time to get away," said Sam Watson.

"Why should we be in such a hurry?" asked Frank. "No bullet can penetrate the car. We are perfectly safe. Reload those rifles, and we'll give them another dose of the medicine they wanted to give us."

Jack and Pomp quickly recharged the rifles, and then all were ready.

Frank turned the Wonder, and dashed directly at the Indians.

They did not see their danger until too late. The deadly repeating-rifles commenced their work again, and in less than three minutes twenty or more were down with lead in their bodies.

The others fired a volley and fled, making off in a body.

"Oh, we'll soon scatter that crowd," said Frank, pursuing them.

The red rascals were fine riders, but they could not ride away from the Wonder. It kept them in range of the deadly rifles, and many a yelling Comanche gave his last whoop on that ride.

At last, utterly demoralized, the red-skins scattered in every direction.

"Now for the circuit," cried Jack, and Frank started the Wonder on a circle, bringing nearly every savage in range of the rifles. They crawled in the grass and tried to hide, and many escaped that way, leaping from their horses and crawling quickly in opposite directions.

"Hanged if that doesn't clear the field!" cried Sam Watson, in the greatest glee. "The whole gang is busted!"

"Yes," remarked Jack, "we can lick a thousand as well as a hundred, for they can't get in, you know."

"Why in thunder and chain lightning don't Uncle Sam buy a lot of these machines, and run 'em out here?" demanded Watson. "They'd clear the plains of red-skins so quick it would make their heads swim."

"This is the only one ever made," said Jack. "Frank may make a bargain with the government yet, though I don't know anything about it."

The Wonder went on its way rejoicing, and the Indians pulled themselves together again, and figured up the cost of their investment. Doubtless they came to the conclusion that it didn't pay to attack "heap wagon—no hoss."

When they reached the next station, they found the people there armed to the teeth and in momentary expectation of an attack by a party of savages hovering on the prairie west of them.

"The Comanches are all on the rampage this season," remarked the station-master. "But we've got a dozen good men who know how to handle rifles."

The Wonder created a sensation, of course, and had to be inspected by everybody about the station. Such a thing had never been dreamed of by any one there, and now they saw in the near future the breaking up of the old stage system of travel.

The Indians, who had been threatening the station all day, now thought that the big double wagon, as they took the Wonder to be, was an additional prize for them. They grew more demonstrative, and dashed about the prairie as if to show their numbers and superior horsemanship.

The Comanches are the finest riders of all the Indians of America, being taught the art of riding from early youth. They seemed, like the famed centaurs of old, to be part of the horses themselves, so admirably did they sit on their steeds.

"We'll go out and see them," said Frank, "and find out what they want. If they want a fight we'll accommodate them. If they want a little fun, why, we can give them some."

All the passengers were willing to go, and the Wonder moved out in the direction of the band of red-skins.

The Indians were naturally surprised at seeing the big wagon coming out to meet them. They supposed that it was sent out to negotiate for them to go away.

When the Wonder got right up to them, Frank tooted the whistle. Lord, how those Indian ponies did scatter! They ran over each other in their terror, and over a dozen went down on the grass with their riders.

Frank and the passengers laughed heartily.

After scattering and running half a mile or so, the most of them stopped to look at the thing that had frightened them with its "whoop."

"They'll come back soon," said Frank, "and then we'll have a chance to talk with them."

But the red-skins did not seem very anxious to approach the strange Wonder, and remained congregated together in wondering silence a half mile away.

"Let's move upon them again," suggested Jack.

"All right," said Frank, "we'll go slow, so as not to scare them again."

The Wonder moved forward again, and slowly approached the main body of Comanches. They saw it coming and grew excited.

"Hold on, red-skins!" cried Frank, opening the door and calling out to them. "I want to talk with you."

"They heard and understood him, and therefore waited till the Wonder came up pretty close to them."

"Hello!" cried Frank, as the engine stopped.

"How?" responded the chief of the band.

"We are all right up to the present time," said Frank. "How is it with you red-skins?"

"Ugh!" grunted the chief.

"Where are you going?"

"Go hunt buffalo!" said the chief.

"Where are the buffalo?"

The chief pointed toward the setting sun.

"Well, you've been here all day. Are you waiting for the buffaloes to come to you?"

"No. We go when ready," was the reply.

"That's right, old duffer. Never go after a buffalo till you are ready. You might get hurt, you know."

The Indians eyed the young inventor very suspiciously. They evidently suspected the Wonder to be some kind of an infernal machine that would bear watching. Otherwise they would have attacked the party then and there.

"I want to ask you a question, chief?"

"Ugh!"

"Do you want a fight?"

The chief opened his eyes in the most profound astonishment. That a little handful of men, less than half a score, should seek a fight with over one hundred Indians, was more than he could understand.

"Ugh, me fight—me great brave," he replied.

"Well, who do you want to fight—white men or Indians?"

The wily savage replied that he wanted to fight his enemies.

"Who are your enemies—white men?"

He made no reply.

"Do you want to attack the stage station there and steal the horses?"

Still no reply.

"Now, look here, red-skin," Frank continued, "you'd better go hunt the buffalo. You'll get the worst of it if you go to troubling the whites."

"White boy heap big talk," said the chief sneeringly.

"Yes, and you'll find him heap big fight, too," replied Jack, "if you want to try it on."

"Boy heap talk," said the chief. "Me great brave—no fight women and boys."

"You're a great liar and coward!" retorted Frank. "You would scalp a mother and child as quick as you would steal a horse, if you thought there was no danger. Now look here, red-skins, I came out here to tell you to go away from here and not interfere with the people up at the station there. Now will you go?"

"Ugh!" grunted the chief. "Boy big fool. Me take his scalp and have his wagon!" and he gave a whoop that was answered by one hundred others.

Frank blew the whistle, which scattered the ponies instant. Jack, Pomp, and Sam Watson then opened fire with the sixteen-charge repeating-rifles. Frank then started the Wonder in a circle, to enable them to do the work more effectively.

An Indian went down at every shot. They returned the fire, but their bullets struck the car and dropped to the ground.

The execution was simply terrible. Nearly one half were soon killed or wounded, and the others drew off to devise a better way of destroying the boys.

But Frank wouldn't give them time to consult. He charged on them and scattered them, till they were glad to sneak away, with two thirds of their number dead or dying.

The passengers yelled with frantic delight, and the Wonder turned toward the station once more, to receive the plaudits of the people there who had witnessed the fight.

CHAPTER XXI.

MYSTERIOUS CAPTURE OF FRANK READE, JR.

THE defeat of the Comanches was complete. The straggling parties kept on their way till they became but small moving specks in the horizon. They had had enough of the "big wagon," and didn't want to know anything more about it.

The rejoicing of the station agent and the employees of the stage company was hearty and sincere. They gathered around the Wonder and insisted that Frank, Jack and Pomp should get out and drink with them.

"You've got to do it, pard," said a huge frontiersman. "Come outen that machine and take your dose like a little man."

"We may as well get out, Frank," said Jack, laughing.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. It won't hurt us, any way," replied Frank, and he stepped out. The crowd seized and literally bore him into the station, where the best liquor in the place was put out as free as water. The men drank glass after glass, but our two heroes would only take one small drink each, after which they went back to the Wonder.

"By the great serpent, Jack!" exclaimed Frank, as he regained the car, "I was uneasy."

"What about?"

"The Wonder. Had there been a daring villain in that crowd who wanted to steal it, he could have gotten away with it. We must never leave it alone again."

"That's so; I never thought of that," said Jack. "We must look out for that hereafter."

"All aboard!" cried Frank.

The passengers and Sam Watson made a rush for the car, and tumbled in as fast as they could.

A moment later the whistle blew, and the Wonder moved away, followed by the cheers of the station men.

Out on the plains again, the Wonder made splendid time.

The road was smooth and hard, so there was but little to impede a rapid go. On, on it sped, and the passengers cheered as the buildings at the station sank down in the horizon.

Night came on, and a full moon shed a flood of silvery light over the illimitable plains. The head-light guided them safely, and mile after mile was passed in quick succession.

"You may look out for the river soon now," said Sam Watson, the stage-driver.

"I am very dubious about going into the water," said Frank. "If we get mired up in the water, nothing can get us out."

"Oh, the river-bed is as hard as this road," said Sam, "and the banks are very sloping."

"Well, we'll have to examine it very closely."

"Of course. I wouldn't have you run any risks, pard."

A half hour later they came to the river. The water was silvery clear and limpid in the light of the full moon. They all got out, and Frank stripped and waded in to examine the bottom. He found it hard, white sand, and that the water came just above his knees in the deepest part.

But Frank would not be satisfied till he waded clear over to the other side. The stream was one hundred yards wide. The reflector threw the rays of light over on the opposite bank.

Jack and the others were watching him. He reached the other side, and was examining the bank closely to see if the Wonder could climb out of the water there, when two men darted out of the timber, seized, and dragged him out of sight before the eyes of his astonished friends.

"My God!" gasped Jack, "he is captured by outlaws! Jump in, quick—hurry up!"

They all sprang in, and Jack pulled the steam handle with an energy that sent the Wonder headlong into the river.

It ran through the water with a roar that could have been heard a mile.

"Get your weapons ready!" cried Jack, seizing a repeating-rifle himself.

The others followed his example.

"Pomp, you must stay on board, to prevent any one getting inside."

"Dat's er fac!" replied the faithful darkey.

The Wonder rushed up the sloping bank on the other side about fifty yards from the water, and there halted.

"Now follow me, all but Pomp," he cried, leaping to the ground.

The others followed—all but Pomp.

"Keep well closed, Pomp, and let no one but our crowd in."

"Yes, sah! Dey cain't git in," replied Pomp, with an energy that assured Jack that he would be equal to the task of guarding the Wonder.

Jack and Watson then led the pursuit through the timber. They beat every bush in their way, revolvers in hand ready for any emergency.

Still no trace of the outlaws could be found.

"By my soul!" groaned Jack, "I would rather die than go back without him. Hanged if I don't hunt over all the West but what I'll find him or those outlaws!"

"I'm with you there, pard!" said Watson.

"He'd never go back on a friend."

"Never! He's the truest friend that ever lived!"

They turned and made their way back to the road, keeping close to the river, but failed to find any traces of him.

"We'll have to wait for daylight to follow their trail," said one of the passengers.

"Frank is half naked," said Jack, "and will catch his death of cold in the night air. I'll keep hunting all night but that I'll find some clew to his captors."

"I'll go with you, pard," put in the stage-driver.

"So will we all," said the others.

"Come on, then. We saw them go in here on this side of the road. Let's go through again." The whole party followed him into the timber, and pushed on for nearly a quarter of a mile.

"Hark! Hush-sh!" and Sam Watson stopped the entire party for nearly a minute. They could hear nothing.

"I am sure I heard a horse down on the right there," he whispered.

"I thought so too," said one of the passengers.

"Come on, then," said Jack. "We'll soon see whether there is a horse there or not."

They followed him, and in five minutes came to the river.

"There's no horse here," said Jack. "You must have been mistaken."

"I may have been, but I was quite sure I heard one."

"So was I," said the passenger, who claimed to have heard the same noise that Sam did.

"Well, let's go further up on this side and see what we can find."

They followed along the river-bank one or two hundred yards, looking carefully into every clump of bushes for a concealed enemy.

Nothing whatever could they find, and they turned to retrace their steps, when three of them declared they heard a horse snort back in the timber. Of course they went back in search of the horse, rambling about east, west and north.

But all their labor was in vain. They could find no traces of a horse, and seemed to be puzzled to know what next to do.

"Let's wait a few minutes and listen," suggested Jack.

"Yes," remarked Sam, "I was thinking about that."

They stopped and listened.

Everything was so quiet they could hear each

other's heart beat. But they heard nothing else.

"My God!" groaned Jack, turning ashen pale, "this is awful! How can we do without Frank? We must find him. Come on, and let's go back toward the road by going further away from the water."

They started, each man growing more desperate as the time passed without finding any trace of the young inventor.

"Hark!" and every man stopped as if rooted to the spot.

A pistol-shot had rung out on the still night air.

Crack! went another—and another.

"To the Wonder!" cried Jack, darting away with the speed of a deer. "Come, quick!"

CHAPTER XXII.

POMP'S FINE STRATEGY—FRANK RESCUED.

WHEN Frank Reade, Jr., was seized by two stalwart outlaws on the banks of the river on the opposite side from his companions, he was unarmed and powerless to resist.

One of the men clapped a revolver to his head, and hissed:

"Make any noise or trouble, and you'll pass in your chips!"

"Who the blazes are you?" demanded Frank. "Never mind who we are," one replied, whilst they both seized him by the arms and dragged him into the bushes out of the rays of the powerful reflector.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked, as he went with them.

"We want you just now," was the reply. "Come on with you."

They hurried him forward and crowded him into a clump of bushes, where they pressed him down to the ground, and waited for developments.

Frank heard the rush of the Wonder through the water, and knew that those inside of it would not leave him to his fate.

The robbers heard Jack's instructions to Pomp to let no one enter the car but those who belonged to it; also the search that was going on.

"If you make a noise to attract their attention," hissed one of the outlaws in his ear, "I'll blow out your brains, because it would be death to us to be captured."

"I won't say a word," said Frank, "but I can save you if they find me."

"We don't want you to save us," said the man. "We can do that ourselves. Keep quiet now."

Jack and his companions came up to the very clump of bushes, and actually struck it several times with their rifles, and then passed on.

"That was a narrow escape," whispered one outlaw to the other.

"Yes—we are not safe yet. Hush!"

They waited half an hour, and heard the party of pursuers go up further in the timber.

"See here, now," said the stouter of the two outlaws, bending low over their prisoner. "We don't want to kill you. That isn't our intention. We want that machine of yours. That nigger is in there as a guard. You must go up to it with us and tell him to open it. He knows your voice, and will obey. The first movement to escape will be your death. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Will you do it?"

"Yes."

"Come on, then. We'll take care of the nigger."

They led him out into the stage-road and approached the rear end of the car.

As good fortune would have it, Pomp was peeping through the blinds in that direction, watching the road down to the water, and saw them come up with Frank between them.

He could see Frank's pale face in the clear moonlight, also the revolvers in the hands of the two men.

"Pomp!" called Frank.

"Hello, Marse Frank! Am dat yer?" replied Pomp, through the blinds.

"Yes; open the door, Pomp. I am very cold and wet."

"All right, Marse Frank," and he promptly opened the door of the car.

One of the outlaws sprang into the door, but Pomp planted his revolver against his head and pulled the trigger.

He fell in a heap at Pomp's feet.

"That settles the nigger," said the other outlaw, and even Frank himself thought Pomp was done for forever.

There was no light in the car, so he could not see within.

"Now come in with you, and start the machine. We want to get away from here now."

The second outlaw put one foot on the step,

and was about to spring in, when a second shot broke his arm. His revolver dropped to the ground, and he sprang back with an oath.

"Who fired that shot?" he angrily demanded.

"De nigger did!" replied Pomp, leaping out and confronting him with his smoking revolver in his hand.

"Perdition!" hissed the villain, turning and darting toward the woods.

Frank sprang forward and seized him. He was too strong for him, and would have gotten away had not Pomp butted him like a thunderbolt, and knocked him senseless to the ground.

"Pomp, you are worth your weight in gold!" cried Frank, seizing Pomp's hand and wringing it with all his might.

"Dat's er fac!" said Pomp, "but I ain't er gwine ter sell out for all de gale in de worl'."

Just then Jack and the others dashed into the road in breathless haste.

"Hello, Frank!" cried the surprised and delighted Jack. "Is it all right?"

"Yes, I guess it is," he replied; "at least it will be as soon as I get dressed."

"Are you hurt?"

"No."

"Are you hurt, Pomp?"

"No, sah."

"Who fired those shots?"

"I did, sah."

"What at?"

"Dere's one dead un in de keer, an' de udder un is hyer on de groun'."

They looked and found one of the villains just recovering consciousness.

"He isn't dead!" said Sam Watson, holding his revolver in his direction.

"No, sah."

"Don't kill him," said Frank.

Pomp dragged the other body out of the car, and then lit a lamp and got Frank's clothes for him, whilst Watson and Jack guarded the wounded man.

Frank told the story in a few words, and every one said Pomp was a hero.

"Dat's er fac," assented Pomp. "I seed 'em comin' wid Marse Frank, an' laid for 'em wid my pistil. I see er had nigger sometimes."

The party roared with merriment for several minutes.

"I say, boys," said Frank, "we must fill the casks with water here."

Pomp got the pails, and in twenty minutes the tank and casks were filled with water.

"Now you, chap," said Frank, "I want to take a look at you in the light. Bring him around in front, where we all can see him."

"Here, you cowardly skunk!" said Watson, "get up, here and let's see what kind of a galoot you are."

The man groaned, as if in great pain.

"Two of you bring him along," said Frank.

Two men seized him and brought him around in front of the engine, where the headlight gave all a good view of him.

He was a powerful built, muscular man. His right arm hung limp by his side. Blood was dropping from the tips of his fingers.

"By the Lord Harry!" exclaimed Sam Watson, "you helped rob my stage once up on White River!"

The man never said a word.

"Do you know him, Watson?" Frank asked.

"No—not his name. I know his face, though, and can swear to it."

"That's enough. What shall we do with him?"

"Hang him!"

"Shoot him!"

"Drown him!"

"Burn him!"

The wretch stood unmoved in the midst of the angry men around him. He knew that there was no mercy in that crowd for him.

He had played a bold game and lost.

To lose was death.

He had faced death before, and was defiant, like such villains often are.

"I see you are all in favor of killing him in some way," said Frank, "but we ought to settle on some plan."

"Hang him," said Sam Watson.

"Yes," put in Sam's passengers, "hang him, and leave him hanging to the tree."

"Tie 'im to de keer," said Pomp, "an' run 'im ter def'."

"That's the idea!" cried Watson, in the greatest glee. "Tie a rope around his neck and fasten it to the car. He can then live as long as he can run. When he can't run, let him drag—the villain!"

"That's it—drag him! drag him!" cried every one in the party.

Jack ran into the car and brought out a regular Texas lariat.

"This is just the thing," he said, handing it to Watson.

The stage-driver adjusted the lariat around the rascal's neck, and Pomp fastened it to the car.

Then they searched him for knives, or anything with which he could free himself. His unhurt arm was secured to his side.

"Are you ready to pass in your cheeks?" Watson asked.

"Oh, yes—drive ahead," was the cool reply.

"All aboard!" cried Frank.

They all got aboard. The whistle awoke the echoes for miles around, and the next moment the Wonder started off.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DRAWING AN OUTLAW TO DEATH.

WHEN the Wonder started it moved slowly at first, and the doomed man trotted leisurely along behind it.

He trotted along till the Wonder passed beyond the timber. Then the whistle tooted again and the speed increased to a run.

Faster and faster it ran, until it seemed to reach the utmost of the Wonder's limit. Still the doomed wretch ran, his white face and staring eyes giving him a ghastly look in the moonlight.

Every one in the car was gazing at him, wondering at his wonderful endurance.

"He can't hold out much longer," said Frank, "for he has run over ten miles now."

Suddenly they were all startled by a wild shriek from the wretch, and the next moment he fell!

Those inside turned away and would not look at the body that was dragging behind the car.

Five miles were passed after he fell, and then Frank said to Watson:

"Suppose you cut the lariat? He is dead as a herring now."

"All right," said the stage-driver. "It makes me feel queer to have his body following us that way."

He drew his knife, opened the door and cut the lariat.

In two minutes more it was out of sight and the party breathed freely.

"That ends those two fellows," said Jack.

"Yes," said Frank; "but if it had not been for Pomp, we would have all been ended ourselves."

"I believe you, Frank, and it shows how important it is that we keep the car well guarded."

"Yes, we ought always to be particular about that. How far is it to the next station, Watson?"

"About five miles, now, I think," replied the stage-driver.

"Oh, we'll soon reach that," and he crowded on a full head of steam. The road was a dead level one and quite firm.

"I see a light ahead!" exclaimed Jack.

"That's the station," said Watson.

Frank blew the whistle, which had the effect of bringing everybody out doors.

The Wonder created the most intense amazement, and had not Sam Watson sprang out and ordered the hands about in the style of all the drivers on the route, they would have fled into the house and stable and barricaded the door.

"Why, Sam!" exclaimed one of the men, "where in Hail Columbia did you get that train of cars?"

"It ain't a train," replied Sam. "It's a new stage—understand?"

"No, I don't understand," replied the man. "I can't understand how a steam engine can run down here without a railroad track."

"Well, this is an independent concern, and doesn't care a continental for tracks. It's here, and we all want a drink of something hot and strong."

Pomp remained in the car as guard, whilst Jack and Frank went in with the party to drink something that would make them feel better than they did.

They had plenty of good stuff in the car, but they would not let the passengers know it, as there would be danger of having it all used up before they reached the end of the trip.

"How much ahead of time are we?" Frank asked of the relay agent.

"Twelve hours," was the reply.

"Then we will sleep here to-night," said Frank. "There's no use in running all night when there is no necessity for it."

"Hip-hip-hurrah-hurrah!" cried the whole batch of passengers. "We'll have a night of rest and a fresh start in the morning."

"That's the ticket," said Watson; "I want a rest too."

Pomp was carried a hot drink, and then Sam and two others volunteered to guard the mails.

"No need of that," said Frank. "We will sleep in the car, which will be locked. Nothing

can interfere with them. But you had better sleep on the bags in order to comply with your duties."

"That's it."

"The passengers can get beds in the house, can't they?"

"Of course they can."

"That makes it all right then."

Jack went to the wounded passenger, and found him doing well. He expressed a desire to be let alone, and Jack said that was a good sign and left him.

In another hour the whole party were asleep and dreaming.

Early the next morning they were all awakened by a stage dashing up from below filled with passengers.

Sam inquired if there were any Indians below, and was told that there were a few, but they were quiet.

After a hearty breakfast the party got aboard, and the Wonder moved slowly away from the station. A mile further it was going at a rapid speed.

"We can reach the end of the route this afternoon, where we connect with the Santa Fe stages," said Watson.

"I didn't know it was such a long run," said Frank; "but I intended to come this far, anyhow."

"You will find some hills at the lower end of the route," remarked Watson.

"Can we climb them?"

"Oh, yes; the roads are good."

"That's all right, then."

Nothing of interest occurred on the way, and in three hours they reached another station.

All hands were amazed at the Wonder, and crowded around and examined it with the greatest curiosity. They scarcely believed what they saw.

There was a delay of twenty minutes there, after which they started off again at full speed.

The end of that section of the route was Valley Town, a village of several hundred inhabitants. There were several very productive mines in the vicinity of Valley Town, which attracted many rough characters.

The Wonder found several hills to climb before it reached Valley Town. The country was more rugged, and well timbered in many places. But the road was good all the way. They reached Valley Town in the middle of the afternoon.

Watson piloted the way through the streets to the post-office and hotel in the place.

The whistle sent everybody out of doors. They knew it was a steam whistle, but wondered where it came from.

Such an astonished crowd as gathered around the Wonder! Everybody knew Sam Watson, but they didn't know his stage—not this one—and a thousand questions were hurled at him at once.

He could not deliver the mail-pouches till the postmaster had a guard put out to make way for them, so great was the excitement.

When the mail was delivered Watson got up on a box and told the crowd the story of the invention, and the wonderful work it had done in defeating the Indians and saving the mails.

The crowd yelled and cheered, and called for Frank. He made his appearance and said:

"I am glad to see you all. We had a good time on the trip, and hope to have a good time going back. We will stop here a week to rest and see the country."

The rough miners and rancheros cheered him lustily, and called him the brainiest young man in the country.

The passengers paid their fares like men, and forced him to accept a dinner from them.

"We never could have come through alive on the stage," they said, "and therefore we are more indebted to you and your Wonder than words can express."

"Oh, that's all right," said Frank. "I'll eat dinner with you. There's nothing mean about me."

Then, next day there was a big dinner at the "Grub House" in Valley Town, at which half a hundred rough-and-ready men of the town sat down to the table. They did things in the usual American style.

Jack and Frank both responded to toasts in neat little speeches, and Frank told the story of Pomp's quick work in bagging the two outlaws who had captured him.

That created the wildest enthusiasm.

"Where's the nigger! Trot him out! Give him a show," and a score of similar calls were made.

"He is in the car guarding the property there," said Frank. "We never leave it unguarded."

"Which shows a level head," said one of the red-shirts. "Hyar, landlord, send a twenty dollar lunch out to the nigger, and throw in all the

whisky his skin will hold. You may whoop at me for the dust."

The landlord knew his man. He prepared a sumptuous repast, and garnished it with brandy, wine, and whisky, and sent it out to the cars on two trays.

Pomp was surprised as well as tickled. He pitched in and gorged himself with the good things, and then sampled the liquors.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE JOKE ON POMP—THE GAMBLERS.

A HALF an hour later Frank whispered to Jack: "Go out and look after Pomp. They'll get him as drunk as a billed owl before they get through with him."

As he had eaten all he could stow away, Jack slipped away and went out to the Wonder, which had been left standing in the street, so everybody could get a good look at it, and found Pomp nursing a bottle of brandy like a Dutch mother.

"Hello, Marse (hie) Jack!" greeted Pomp, as Jack came into the car. "Dis am er bully ole town (hie) ain't it?"

"Yes, but how about the whisky, Pomp?"

"Bes' lick'er in der worl', Marse Jack. Take (hie) a pull?" and he handed the bottle to Jack.

"Don't care if I do," replied Jack, taking the bottle, and seeing it was still half full, added:

"Let me get a glass of water."

He went to the water, and deliberately poured out all there was in the bottle, letting it run to the ground through the pipe.

"Here's luck to you, Pomp," he said, turning up the bottle and pretending to take a long pull at it.

He held it up so long that Pomp, full as he was, felt uneasy as regards the contents, and exclaimed:

"Look out dere, Marse Jack! Dat's er bad anemie youse foolin' wid'!"

"What's the matter with it?" asked Jack, looking scared.

"Too much is bad," said Pomp.

"Why in thunder didn't you say so before?"

"Didn't know dat?"

"No—I've taken every drop of it."

"De Lor' gorramitey!" exclaimed Pomp, his eyes almost bulging out of his head. "What for yer do dat, Marse Jack? Youse'll hab de monkeys arter yer, suah!"

"What in blue blazes did you give me such stuff for?"

"De Lor' bless yer!" groaned Pomp, "I didn't know youse'd drink er quart, honey!" and the fright it gave nearly sobered him at once.

Jack was nearly bursting with suppressed laughter. Pomp was nearly in the same condition from fright.

"Pomp, I feel as if the Wonder was running away with me!" cried Jack, keeping up the racket. "What's the matter with me? Where's Frank? The Indians are coming! Get the rifles! Where's my revolver?"

"Oh, Lor'!" gasped Pomp, scared into complete soberness, "dat boy am got 'em, suah! He'll kill somebody ef he gets dim pistols!"

"Whoop!" yelled Jack; "Indians! They've got my scalp! Ha, ha, ha!—got my scalp! Take old Pomp's scalp, too! Ha, ha, ha!" and he sprang at Pomp like a young blood-hound.

Pomp grabbed and held him in a vise-like grip.

"Marse Jack! Marse Jack!" he cried. "Don't yer know ole Pomp? I ain't no Injun. Ise ole Pomp. De lor' gorramitey! Dat war bad lick'er for yer!"

Jack suddenly calmed down, looked up at Pomp, and asked:

"How goes it, old man? Are you sober yet?"

Pomp's eyes grew as big as tea-cups. He glared at the young joker as though fully convinced that reason had been dethroned. But he held tightly to him, and wouldn't let go.

"I say, old man," said Jack again, "that was a good joke, wasn't it?"

"What dat yer say?"

"That was a good joke. I did not touch a drop of the stuff."

"Yer foolin' me, Marse Jack."

"No, I ain't. I poured it out through the pipe." Pomp went to the waste-pipe and put his nose to it.

That satisfied him.

"What for yer do dat?" he asked, half angry at the loss of the brandy.

"To keep you from getting blind drunk, old man."

"De lor' gorramitey, Marse Jack! I ain't drunk!"

"Of course not. I scared you sober as a judge," and Jack burst into a fit of uproarious laughter, in which Pomp was compelled to join in spite of his desire to do otherwise.

"Marse Jack," he said, "dat war er good joke on ole Pomp, kase it spiled his dram; but look

out of I don't make yer laugh er gin for dat, suah."

"Oh, that's all right, old man," said Jack. "No man enjoys a joke better than I do."

Frank came in after awhile, and joined in the laugh on Pomp. But while the joke spoiled his drunk, it didn't hurt his dinner. He enjoyed the dinner, and felt as big as a New York alderman after eating a dinner at the expense of the corporation.

That night there was a grand hop at the "Grub House." All the women in the town were there. There were ten men to one woman, as the gentler sex is never very numerous in mining towns. But those who were there were brave and true women, who had no fear of the perils of a frontier life. They were pretty and amiable, and seemed to appreciate the genius of the young inventor in the highest degree.

Jack and Frank danced with a score of different girls and women, and promised to give them a ride in the Wonder the next day—a promise they were sure not to let them forget.

The next day he fired up, and, with a full head of steam, waited for the appearance of the girls. They came in twos and threes, until the car was jammed with them.

"Too many for one load," said Frank, shaking his head. "The Wonder can't climb a hill with so many on board. Half will have to get off and wait till we return. Pomp will stay behind with his fiddle, and you can dance for an hour or two."

That pleased the girls immensely, and at least half got off to wait and dance till the Wonder came back.

Blowing the whistle, the Wonder moved out of town, followed by the cheers of 500 miners. It went up and down hill at fine speed. The girls were charmed to find they were going so fast with so little danger and inconvenience.

On the return they sang and made merry like light-hearted young maidens, and thanked Frank and Jack for the treat.

The second batch had danced incessantly till the return of the Wonder. The first batch insisted on dancing till the others had returned. Pomp said he would fiddle a week for them if they wanted him to.

The second trip was but a repetition of the first. The young people enjoyed themselves to their hearts' content, and returned home with recollections that would last them a life-time.

In all mining towns there have always been thieves, robbers, and gamblers—men ready to commit any crime for gold.

Valley Town was no exception to the rule. There were blackleg desperados there who were ready for anything. It was not surprising, therefore, that a party of them conspired and plotted together to get possession of the Wonder, for with it they could defy all known means to capture them, and could plunder with all the impunity of pirates on the high seas.

Frank first suspected such a design when a regular blackleg gambler began making inquiries as to how the machine was run.

It was natural to ask such questions, but the minute details aroused his suspicions.

He communicated his suspicions to Jack, and Jack then took Pomp into his confidence.

Pomp had usually been the guard in charge of the car when the others were absent. The gamblers had noticed that fact, and began to lay their wires to get possession of the Wonder by drugging Pomp.

They first commenced by treating him to as much liquor as he could drink, and making him believe that they thought he was the real hero of the concern.

Of course Pomp was "up to snuff" every time, and gave everything away to Frank and Jack.

To guard against all possible danger, Frank looked the crank so that it could not be used to turn on the steam, and kept it locked till he wanted to use it himself. Then he knew that it could never leave him without his consent.

On the third night after these precautions had been taken, Pomp was sitting in the door of the car, listening to the music of a dance going on at the "Grub House." A half dozen stalwart fellows came up and said:

"Hello, Pomp, give us a ride."

"Can't do it, boss."

"Why not?"

"Ain't got no steam."

"You can have it in ten minutes."

"Marse Frank ain't hyer, an—"

"That'll do!" hissed one of the men, clapping the muzzle of a revolver against his ear. "Just fire her up, and be quick about it, or you're a dead nigger!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ATTEMPT TO STEAL THE WONDER.

POMP felt the cold muzzle of the revolver against his ear, and came to the instant conclusion that he had nothing else to do but to obey. He was not such a good Christian that he wanted to begin climbing the golden stairs then and there. On the contrary, he felt that he was too bad to die just then. He wanted more time.

"Y-yes, sah!" he stammered; "c-c-come right in, sah!"

The six men entered the car, and closed the door.

"Now fire her up, Pomp," said the leader, "and no fooling about it, understand."

"Yes, sah," and Pomp, whose long experience in the West told him that these were very dangerous men to trifle with, struck a lucifer match and started the furnace.

The light glowed with a fierce heat which would soon set the water to boiling.

The six desperadoes gazed at the queer furnace for several minutes in perfect silence.

"How long will it take to get up steam enough?" the leader asked.

"Fifteen minutes, sah," was the reply. One man looked at his watch and said:

"We have twelve minutes to wait yet, then."

Those twelve minutes seemed almost an hour to those desperate men. They knew the danger of being caught before they could get away with the Wonder. They knew that everybody in Valley Town was a friend to the young inventor and his cousin, and that a fight would be death to them.

By and by the steam began hissing in the boiler.

"See if she will go now," said the leader, turning to one of their number who had been something of an engineer in his younger days.

The man—Jim Brady—tried the steam crank, but could not move it.

"What's the matter with it?" he asked of Pomp.

"Dunno, sah. I dunno nuffin erbout it. I se de cook on dis hyer train."

"What's the matter?" the leader of the party asked of Jim.

"That's what I want to know," replied Jim. "This crank seems to be fastened some way."

"Do you know what the trouble is, Pomp?"

"No, sah. I dunno nuffin erbout it," said Pomp. "Marse Frank allers done dat, sah."

They were satisfied that he was telling the truth, for they well knew he was not the engineer of the Wonder. But they thought he might know the peculiar construction of the machine.

"Which one does he pull to start her?" Brady asked.

"Dunno, boss."

"Try one of the others, Jim," suggested the leader.

Jim took hold of one of the other handles and gave it a sudden wrench.

The effect was startling.

The steam-whistle awoke the echoes of the town!

"Perdition!" hissed the leader in a furious rage. "That'll call Reade and all the people out of the tavern!"

"Try all the others!" hissed one of the six men.

Brady grasped the others, but they were to be used only when the Wonder was in motion. The whistle blew again, as if to call out everybody in the town.

"We must run for it, boys!" said the leader. "They are coming now!" And leaping out of the car, they dashed away at full speed down the street.

"Dar dey go!" yelled Pomp, drawing a revolver and firing at them. "Kotch um! kotch um!"

"What's the matter, Pomp?" Frank asked, dashing up to the black as he was sending bullets after the desperadoes.

"Dis you, Marse Frank! Golly, but dey had me dat time, suah!"

"What was it? What were you shooting at?" demanded Frank, seizing him, and thus stopping the shooting.

"Dey come up heah an' put er pistil ter me head," he said, "an' tole me ter fire up or dey would fire me head off. I lit de furnace an' dey waited till de steam was er fryin', den dey tried fur ter make her go; but she wouldn't go. Dey pulled de udder crank, an' lordy! Dat whistle jes' blowed um outen de keer. Dey run like Ole Nick down dat way," and he pointed in the direction the desperadoes had gone.

A crowd soon gathered, and the story passed from mouth to mouth with startling rapidity.

"Lynch 'em!"

"Shoot 'em!"

"Hang 'em!"

"Run the machine over 'em!"

"Whar's the galoots?"

"Run 'em down!" and a score of other angry suggestions and questions were hurled at the young inventor as the story gathered on its way from mouth to mouth.

"Maybe we'll catch 'em yet," said Frank, turning to the crowd. "I took the precaution to lock the steam-crank, which is all that saved us. I'll give one hundred dollars for the arrest of those fellows."

"That'll fetch 'em!" cried a man in the crowd.

"I've got the dust for the man who brings 'em in," added Frank.

The attempt to capture the Wonder created the most intense excitement in Valley Town. Pomp gave a description of the men which pretty well settled the question of their identity.

The honest, red-shirted miners swore they would hang the rascals if they were found in Valley Town again.

That the Wonder had been saved was deemed a great thing by the honest red-shirts of the town.

"It came near being the death of the nigger," said one.

"But the nigger was too much for 'em," said another.

The crowd cheered, and Pomp began to swell up with pride.

"Dey didn't git er way wid me," he said.

"There's a dead man down the street there," said a boy, running up to the crowd.

"A dead man! Who is he?" and the crowd made a break for the spot.

Scarcely fifty yards away from the spot where the Wonder stood they found a man dead as a smoked herring.

A bullet-hole in the back of his head told the story of his death.

Pomp gazed on the man's face, and exclaimed: "Dat's de man what blowed de whistle!"

"It's Jim Brady!" said an old red-shirt.

"Jim wasn't a bad 'un," remarked a man in the crowd.

"He was gittin' bad, though," said another.

"He went with them black-legs an' didn't dig honest dirt no more."

"It's the nigger's shot that settled him," cried one.

"Hurrah for Pomp!"

The discovery of the dead man gave a clew as to who the others were, and threats of lynching were freely indulged in by the crowd.

Frank said that he hoped nothing would be done to them, as they were punished enough already.

"We haven't lost anything," he remarked—"not a penny's worth. The Wonder can't be stolen, unless some man can pick it up and walk off with it."

The red-shirts swore to catch the would-be robbers if they remained in those diggings, and Frank and Jack concluded to leave the affair with them.

They never left the car again that evening, and soon retired to rest.

The next day the man Brady was buried like an outcast. Pomp went to look after the burial, as he had furnished the corpse.

He was regarded as something wonderful by the young roughs who had not yet "killed their men."

That afternoon Frank and Jack gave the Wonder a thorough overhauling, preparatory to leaving.

The stage came in that evening, loaded down with passengers and mails. All along the route they had heard of the Wonder, and were anxious to see it.

"There are men waiting to capture it," said the driver, "and you'll have a sweet time getting through the way you came."

"When anybody tells you we have lost the Wonder just tell him he's a liar, and you'll tell the truth," said Frank. "Nothing but the United States army can take it from us."

"Don't be sure unless you know all about it," cautioned the driver.

"I do know all about it," said Frank. "Don't you put up any money on the outlaws getting the best of us."

"I ain't gambling any this year," returned the stage-driver, as he passed into the bar of the Grub House.

CHAPTER XXVI.

POMP IN TROUBLE.

THE postmaster wanted the young inventor to carry the mail in charge of the stage-driver, and over twenty men made application for passage. On account of the speed, and absolute safety as regarded Indians and outlaws, the passengers were willing to pay \$100 each.

"I don't mind taking ten passengers," said

Frank, "but I don't want the mails. There is too much responsibility, and I have no contract with the Government."

The postmaster said:

"Demonstrate to the Government that you can carry the mails quicker and safer than the present contractors can, and you can get the contract next year."

"The Government will soon learn of the Steam Wonder's speed, and then make me an offer. It will pay better to carry passengers just now," and he stoutly refused to be encumbered with a ton of mail-bags.

The twenty passengers concluded to throw dice for chances to go, as but ten could go at a time.

The game took place at the Grub House.

The first man who won was a little plucky red-shirted fellow.

"I'll give you two hundred dollars for your seat," said his opponent.

"I'll take it," was the reply. "I am not in a hurry. I can wait for the next stage."

"I'll be back again in a week," said Frank, who saw a chance to make back the money he had spent in the construction of the Wonder.

"Then I'll secure my place now," and the little fellow at once paid the money, taking a receipt for it.

The raffle went on, and the men who were to go, paid down their money and prepared to go.

"By George, Frank," said Jack, "a thousand dollars each way will soon pay for the thing."

"Yes—I want to take back money enough to pay father every cent he advanced to me. I'll make a dozen trips and then go home."

"It'll make him open his eyes, won't it?"

"Yes, and he'll back me up in anything I want to undertake after that."

Early the next morning the ten passengers boarded the car. The steam-whistle awoke the echoes of the town and then the Wonder moved down the street, followed by the ringing shouts of three hundred miners.

The passengers responded to their cheers until the distance was too great for voices to be heard. Then the Wonder settled down to business. The hills were climbed very carefully, but when the open prairie was reached the full speed of eighteen or twenty miles per hour was made.

The passengers hurried and cheered until they were hoarse. The grass seemed like smooth velvet as the car whirled over it. Scarcely a jolt was heard, and the slight clicking of the machinery was scarcely noticed.

In one hour the first stage-station was reached. The men there greeted them with rousing cheers as they recognized the Wonder as the dredging machine that would clear the channel of all obstructions—outlaws and Indians.

They stopped five minutes at the station to allow the men to get drinks, and then moved away again.

Now a dead level for over one hundred miles lay before them. They rushed along at a speed that was startling to some of the passengers.

"Ain't we going too fast?" one of them asked.

"Well, no," replied Jack. "There's no danger of our running off the track."

A broad grin greeted the reply, and nothing more was said about the speed, other than to commend it.

Game of every description was scared up. Jack-rabbits and all kind of prairie fowl scattered as the monster dashed into their midst.

At times whole flocks of prairie-hens were run into, and many killed before they could rise on the wing.

A few buffalo were seen in the distance, generally two or three miles out of the way.

"Let's bring down a buffalo and have fresh steak for supper," suggested one of the passengers.

"I have taken your money and agreed to put you through as quickly as possible," said Frank; "so I will not leave the road for any purpose without your consent."

They looked hard at him.

"If you all say go for those buffaloes," said he, "why, I'll go."

"Go for 'em!" shouted the ten passengers in a chorus.

"All right. Get the rifles in readiness, Jack."

Jack went for the repeating-rifles, whilst Frank turned the Wonder from the road, and made for the small herd of buffalo some three miles away on the right.

The distance was soon run and the game flushed. The shaggy monsters heard the engine, and at once took to their heels.

Then the passengers yelled and hooted. The frightened buffaloes dashed away at full speed.

But the Wonder soon ran alongside one of them, and half a dozen shots from the repeating-rifles ended his career as a ranger of the plains.

Then they chased another and brought him down.

The game grew more exciting.

The passengers yelled for a third one, and the Wonder gave chase to a huge old bull-buffalo, who was making good time in getting away from that vicinity.

The chase grew exciting. The Wonder came up close behind him, blew the steam-whistle and squirted hot water on his back.

That was more than any bull-buffalo would stand. With a bellow and a roar he turned and faced the engine—head down and tail up.

"My God!" gasped Frank, shutting off the steam and putting on the brakes.

Jack turned pale, and Pomp yelled with all his might at the buffalo.

"Go 'way dar, yer debbil!"

Crash!

The bull was knocked back on his haunches, and the Wonder came to a stand-still. Every one in the car was thrown forward by the force of the collision.

But for the shutting off of the steam and the putting on of the brakes the collision would have been fatal to life, limb, or the Wonder.

As it was, the bull was the only one hurt. He was stunned so thoroughly that he swung his shaggy head from side to side, and did not seem to notice the presence of his implacable foes.

"Dat whack gin 'im er bad headache, suah," said Pomp, as they all got out and surrounded the huge monster.

"Better keep clear there!" said one of the passengers. "Those old bulls are ugly customers when they get cornered."

"One of his horns are broken," remarked Jack.

"Yes, and dar's blud in his eye—look at dat!"

The bull had recovered from the stunning blow and staggered to his feet. Blood was dripping from his nostrils. He was crazed with rage, and made a furious charge at the men.

Several revolver shots were fired at him, which only served to madden him the more. With a bellow and a roar, he plunged forward after them. They ran round the car and scrambled in as fast as they could.

Pomp was behind, and fearing he would be caught on the horn of the monster, undertook to climb upon the top of the Wonder.

He was half-way up, when his foot slipped, and he landed on the back of the infuriated beast.

Pomp had presence of mind enough to grasp the shaggy mane of the bull, and secure his seat on his back.

With a roar the huge beast tried to shake him off. Pomp knew his safety depended on the position he held, and kept it with the agility of a squirrel.

"Whoa dar!" he yelled.

"Hold on, Pomp!" cried Jack, "till I get a shot at him!"

"Oh, Lordy, don't shoot!" yelled Pomp. "De lor' gorramitey! Dis yere ain't no fun! Whoa dar, I tole yer!"

The bull reared, plunged and tried to shake him off.

Some one blew the steam-whistle, and that gave a new terror to the bull. He gave another bellowing roar and started off at a swinging gallop, with his black rider on his back.

"By George, he'll get away with Pomp if we don't follow him up!" exclaimed Frank, "and I don't know whether the engine is all right or not."

He pulled the steam crank, and much to his delight, the engine moved forward.

CHAPTER XXVII.

INDIANS AGAIN—POMP'S TERROR.

WHEN the buffalo dashed away with black Pomp on his back fear lent wings to his feet. The further he got away the faster he ran, until it seemed that he was fairly flying over the level plain.

"Why don't he fall off?" one of the passengers asked.

"It's not a very safe thing to do," remarked another.

"We'll overtake him," said Frank, putting on a full head of steam.

The Wonder shoved ahead at a rattling pace.

"I was afraid that collision had done some mischief," said Frank; "but I guess no harm was done. We are gaining on Pomp and will soon overtake him. I'll bet his wool has straightened out from terror."

"I guess not," said Jack. "I heard Uncle Frank tell about such a ride he had some twenty years ago."

"Yes. I remember hearing it, but he said Pomp was scared almost to death then."

The Wonder gained steadily on the buffalo, and in a short time the passengers were yelling at Pomp to fall off.

"Slide down behind!"

"Jump with him!"

"Roll off sideways!"

"Hold on till he falls!" and dozens of other suggestions were hurled at him.

Pomp was too busy to respond.

He kept his seat and held on to the shaggy mane of the beast.

It was plain that the buffalo was nearly run down. The steam whistle again made him wheel round and face the Wonder.

That caused Pomp to yell with terror. He didn't want to collide with the Steam Wonder.

"Whoa!" he yelled. "Hole on dar, Marse Frank! I ain't er buffler! Whoa, I tole yer!"

The Wonder slackened up her speed as before, but the infuriated beast rushed madly forward, as if to utterly demolish the car.

Pomp's eyes seemed on the point of popping out of his head.

"Jump off—jump off!" yelled Frank and Jack, and he quickly followed their advice.

He rolled off just a few seconds before the bull struck the engine, rolling over and over on the grass, springing to his feet just as the beast struck the Wonder.

The engine had almost stopped when the collision took place. The shock jarred the engine and car, but did no damage. The bull was again thrown back on his haunches, but ere he could regain his feet a half-dozen rifle-shots settled his business.

He rolled over on his side a dead buffalo.

"Hello, Pomp!" cried Frank, as the black hero of a hundred mishaps came up. "What do you mean by trying to get away with our game?"

Pomp grinned from ear to ear.

"De game war gittin' erway wid me, Marse Frank," he replied.

"I believe they will eat a nigger any time when grass is scarce," remarked one of the passengers.

"Dey don't get any ob my meat," said Pomp, entering the car, at which there was a laugh all round.

"Shall we cut up this old bull?" Frank asked.

"No," was the response. "Let's go back and cut up the two young cows we killed."

"All aboard, then."

They crowded aboard again, and the Wonder pushed forward, circling round and making straight for the carcasses of the two cows they had slain.

On reaching them the passengers went to work cutting off the hams, whilst Frank and Jack made a thorough examination of the machinery to see if any damage had been done by the collision with the bull.

They found everything intact and in perfect order.

"It was a hard shock," said Frank, "and I was uneasy about it. But I guess it won't pay a bull to butt against us."

"No," said Frank. "That old fellow got a ringing headache from that first bump. We had some fun out of him, though."

"Yes—that was about the best racket we had. Pomp is rather inclined to think the laugh is on him instead of the buffalo, I guess."

"Oh, he doesn't mind that."

The hind-quarters were cut off the two buffaloes and placed in the car, after which the Wonder again started on its journey, making direct for the old stage road.

They reached the road in a few minutes, and then, under a full head of steam, the Wonder dashed away at a tremendous speed.

Five miles were passed, and the passengers were delighted with the ride.

In another hour the other station was reached, where they received a royal welcome.

The agent said a hunter had come in and reported a band of Indians on the stage-road between there and the river.

"We'll reach the river to-night," said Frank, "and cross by moonlight."

"You had better keep moving," said the agent, "or they will attack you."

"Oh, we don't mind their attacks," replied Frank. "We'd stop just to give them a chance if that would encourage them. The truth is, we are spoiling for a fight."

"They'll give you a fight if you will give them a chance."

"We'll give 'em a chance," said Jack, significantly.

They stopped only ten minutes at the station and then pushed on toward the river, which they hoped to reach before midnight. The sun was then a little above the horizon, and in another hour the stars would be out.

The moon rose as the sun went down. Its silvery rays flooded the illimitable plains with its soft light. It was scarcely necessary to light the headlight, but Pomp did it as soon as the stars came out.

The light enabled them to travel as fast as they would in the daytime.

Two hours after sunset they found a band of Indians on the roadside, whose intentions evidently were to intercept the mail stage.

Of course they didn't expect a steam engine. They were looking for a stage drawn by four horses.

They didn't know exactly what the thing was, but they felt strong enough to tackle it.

Whooping and yelling like so many demons they rode around it and called out:

"Ugh! wagon stop!"

Frank blew the steam whistle, and the Indian ponies scattered helter-skelter like so many terrified sheep, to the intense amusement of those inside the car.

Frank stopped and waited for them to come up again.

They approached slowly, as if half suspicious of the nature of it.

"What do you fellows want?" Frank asked through the steel blinds, without being seen himself.

"Ugh! Want wagon!" was the reply.

"This wagon is not for sale," said Frank.

"No buy—red man take wagon."

"Oh, you want to take it, do you?" the indomitable young inventor asked. "Do you think you can do it?"

"Ugh—yes—take all wagon."

"Now, look here, red-skin, you know you are wrong. You know you will be punished by the government for interfering with people this way. You had better go away before we fire on you. We are able to take care of ourselves."

"White man heap talk," said the Indian.

"Oh, yes, we talk a great deal, but we generally whip you red-skins when we take a notion to do so. Be off with you now!"

He started the Wonder slowly along. The savages, intent on capturing her, surrounded it and commenced firing at the car. The bullets flattened against the car and fell to the ground.

"That settles it—let them have the repeating rifles and revolvers, boys."

The work of death then commenced.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Yells and howls followed.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Whoops and cries of rage and pain filled the air.

Pop—pop—pop! went the revolvers, and Indians caught bullets in their bodies on both sides of the car.

Then they concluded that they wouldn't take the wagon.

They didn't want it. It was a poor thing, anyhow. They turned and fled.

"Oh, take the wagon with you!" cried Frank, turning and pursuing them.

They yelled defiance, but fled all the same.

Crack! Crack! Crack! went the unerring repeating rifles, and many a red-skin wished he had never seen the wagon.

"That'll do," said Frank, turning to the road again. "We must reach the river by midnight, or our water will give out."

They regained the road and rushed on toward the river at full speed.

Suddenly Pomp gave a yell of terror. His eyes were about to pop out of his head.

"Look dar!" he yelled, opening the rear window and pointing to the road behind. "See dat man we run ter def de oder night!"

Jack looked out and saw nothing, but Pomp's terror grew more frightful each moment.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE OUTLAW'S GHOST—THE STORM.

Jack looked at Pomp in the greatest astonishment.

"Why, I don't see anything," he said, turning to the darkey, whose teeth were chattering.

Pomp popped his head to the window and gazed out.

He wiped his eyes and looked again, and he seemed greatly relieved.

"De lor gorramitey!" he gasped, wiping great drops of perspiration from his brow.

"Why, what's the matter with you, Pomp?" Frank asked, unable to understand the cause of his apparent terror.

"Didn't yer see him, Marse Jack?" Pomp asked, turning to Jack Russell.

"I saw nothing nor nobody," replied Jack.

Pomp groaned and looked uneasily out of the window again.

"Yer know dat man what yer tied round de neck an' hung 'im to der keer, Marse Frank."

"Yes; what of him?"

"Wal, I took outen de winder an' seed him runnin' er long wid de rope round his neck, jes' as he did dat night, wid his big eyes starin' at me. Ugh! Gimme some o' dat licker, Marse Frank. I'se got er bad chill, I is."

Jack laughed, and one of the passengers tendered him a drink from one of his flasks. He took

a strong pull at it, and emptied it of its contents.

"Tankee, marsar. Dat warm me all fro."

"It was right along here we dragged that fellow," said Frank, turning to the passengers, "and I guess Pomp was thinking about it and imagined he saw him."

"Tell us about it—give us the story," said the passengers, and Frank told the story of his capture on the banks of the river, his rescue by Pomp, and the punishment that was meted out to the survivor of the two outlaws.

"That fellow ran some ten miles with the rope around his neck," continued Frank, "before he fell and was dragged to death."

The story was a sensational one, and the passengers were greatly excited over it.

"By the great rattler!" yelled one of the men, as he glared through the rear window in the clear moonlight, "there he is now!"

Every man in the car crowded forward to get a look at the specter.

There he was—the clear outlines of the very man following the car at full speed, with staring eyes and pallid face, a rope around his neck which reached to the car.

"By George!" gasped Jack Russell, turning pale as a sheet, "there he is, as natural as life!"

"Let me have a shot at him!" exclaimed one of the passengers. "I've always heard that gunpowder would scare them away."

He ran the gun out of the window, took deliberate aim, and fired.

The smoke cleared away, and revealed the specter still there.

"Cut the rope, Pomp," ordered Jack.

"De Lord sabe us!" groaned Pomp, crouching down in a corner of the car; "I don't want nuffin' ter do wid 'im."

Pomp was extremely superstitious, and so were a few of the passengers, some of whom crouched down alongside of the black, and would not again look at the pursuing specter.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was of more heroic mold. He was a very matter-of-fact youth, who had been taught by his father that dead men can never harm the living.

"That's the first real ghost that I ever saw," he said, after gazing at the specter in silence for several minutes. "I can see through and beyond him. He's a real specter and no mistake. I wonder how far he'll follow us?"

"Young man," said one of the elderly passengers in a husky tone of voice, "you are very cool about it."

"Why be otherwise? Such things never harm any one. I want to see all there is of it. That rope seems to reach up to the car, but you see it gets very dim when you look straight down at it. I guess it will follow us to the river and stop there—the place where we caught him."

The specter did follow them to the river, but the moment the Wonder entered the water it disappeared, and they saw no more of it.

On the other side they stopped, and all hands assisted in refilling the tank and casks with water. This done, they made another start and pushed forward, keeping in the old stage-route.

Just before daylight they reached the next station, and stopped there ten minutes. The passengers got out, took copious drinks at the little bar in the agent's office, and told about the Wonder being pursued ten miles by a ghost.

That story was sure to be retailed to the driver and passengers of the next stage and fill them with dread. But little cared the passengers of the Steam Wonder for that.

The ten minutes up, the Wonder resumed her trip, and pushed on with full speed, the sun rising out of the vast plain with refulgent splendor. The dew on the grass sparkled like myriads of diamonds. Jack thought he had never seen such a brilliant display of jewels in all his life.

Pomp cooked a breakfast of buffalo steaks, bread and coffee while he was going at the rate of twenty miles per hour.

Not being sleeping room for so many, they had to roll in their blankets and get sleep as best they could. The chase of the specter had driven sleep from the eyes of all the passengers during the night, so they were a sleepy crowd after breakfast the next morning.

Half of them lay down and slept till noon.

The other half remained awake, and took their drinks regularly at the stations as they passed them.

Late in the afternoon the most terrific rain-storm they had ever seen came down upon them. The rain came down so heavily that Frank could not see fifty feet ahead of the Wonder.

"This won't do," he said. "We might run into something. I can't stop in such a short distance. We must stop."

"Well, stop her, Frank," said Jack, "and let the machinery cool anyhow. It's the longest run you've ever made without stopping."

They stopped and listened to the deafening

roar of the rain. Jack-rabbits and other small game were in danger of being drowned out. Scores of them stopped under the car, and thus found shelter from the pelting storm.

"By George!" exclaimed Frank, "if we had another river to cross, it would be bad for us."

"The river wouldn't rise for nearly twenty-four hours," remarked one of the passengers.

"How so?"

"Because in a level country like this, the water runs off slowly. It's only where the great volume of rain water rushes down suddenly into the streams that causes them to rise and overflow their banks."

"That's logical enough," said Frank, "but I hadn't thought of it before. At any rate I am glad we have no rivers to cross."

"So am I," added Jack. "I don't believe there's another river in the West that has a bed like the one we crossed last night."

"There may be," said Frank, "but it might take us a long time to find it."

The heavy down-pour lasted some three hours or more, during which time it seemed as if the windows above had been opened, and threatened the drowning of the universe.

"I think it wouldn't be a bad idea to build the next car in the shape of a boat," remarked Jack.

"Just what I was thinking about," said Frank. "The whole country seems to be covered with water."

"It will soon disappear," said one of the passengers. "The earth is very dry and will absorb it like a sponge. There has been no hard rain in this section for many weeks."

"It will be slow traveling for us until the water goes."

"That will not be long."

The rain ceased as suddenly as it had commenced.

The clouds broke, and the sun came out. Raindrops on the grass glistened like precious stones everywhere.

Suddenly the steam whistle shrieked, and such a scattering of Jack-rabbits from under the car!

They went helter-skelter in every direction as rapidly as a flock of partridges on the wing.

Then the Wonder again started on her journey, going slowly at first, owing to the three or four inches of water on the ground.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE STRANGE DISCOVERY OF SUSIE JONES' UNCLE.

Just as the elderly passenger predicted, the parched earth soon drank up all the water, and then the Wonder resumed her full speed again. There was more or less mud on the wheels of the car, but that in no wise interfered with the speed.

"We will reach the end of the trip to-night," said Frank, "unless we meet with something to prevent us."

"Good!" exclaimed a passenger, "that will beat the stage four days."

"I doubt if the stage can get through, as the Indians seem to be everywhere this season."

"They seem to be after the stages particularly," remarked one of the party.

"Yes, and it's the most dangerous traveling a man can do nowadays."

"The government will send troops out again, and there'll be trouble all over the border."

"Yes—the government makes a mistake when it sends out only two or three companies to thrash these red devils. They sometimes destroy such small detachments, which makes them feel that they are about equal to the whites in military strength. If the authorities would send out a thousand or two soldiers at a time and clean out the troublesome tribe, they would soon teach them to keep quiet."

"We have seen nothing of those outlaws the stage-driver spoke of," remarked Jack.

"I was thinking about them," said Frank, "and wondering if they would turn up before we got through."

"I guess they were among those Indians you cleaned out last night," said the elderly passenger again, who seemed to be a man of great experience in that part of the West. "They frequently disguise themselves as Indians, and thus give the red man a great deal more credit for ugly work than he deserves."

"Hanged if I don't believe you are right!"

"Of course I am, young man," returned the man. "I distinctly recognized the voices of white men in that band last night."

"If we ever catch a white man disguised as an Indian," said the young inventor, "and we become convinced he has voluntarily turned Indian, he'll be dragged to death behind this car."

"It would be right. Such men deserve no mercy from white men."

Jack then told the story of the capture of Dick

Morgan and the rescue of the five young girls from the Apaches.

"By the great desert!" exclaimed the elderly passenger, on hearing of the rescue of the girls, "I had two nieces captured or killed by the Apaches over a year ago."

"What were their names?"

"Jones—Susie and Sarah."

"Whoop!" yelled Pomp, springing up and knocking his heels together. "Dem's de gals! Glory hallelujum!"

"In the name of Heaven, young man!" exclaimed the elderly passenger, grasping Frank's arm, "were Susie and Sarah Jones among those you rescued?"

"Yes, sir, and two splendid girls they are, too."

"Thank God!" he murmured, and then he burst into a flood of tears. There was not a dry eye in the car, for there was a manly sympathy in the hearts of all.

"Young man, you have a friend in Duncan Kenward," said the uncle of the girls, "and I have a fortune for the girls. I have long given them up as dead. They are the children of an only sister. What did you do with them? Where are they?"

"They are at my father's house in Readestown, as happy as humming birds."

He wrung Frank's hand, and then shook hands with everybody in the car. Even Pomp came in for his share. But when Jack told the story of the gala day in Readestown, when Pomp's barrel of whisky was auctioned off for the benefit of the girls, every man grasped his big black hand and said he was every inch a man.

"Hanged if this isn't the strangest meeting I ever heard of," remarked Jack Russell. "Who'd have dreamed of you being the uncle of the Jones girls?"

"I was going through to New York to enjoy the money made in mines and mining stocks," said Mr. Kenward, "but I'll go to Readestown first."

"Go with us, then," said Frank, "for I'll run over there as soon as we deliver the passengers at the railroad."

"Of course I will, young man—of course I will. God bless me! I am so happy I don't know what to do! Who has got any good whisky on board? I want to wet my throat or my eyes will overflow again."

A half dozen flasks were instantly thrust at him. He took one and made a strong pull at it, diminishing its contents greatly.

"Ah," he said, smacking his lips. "My heart is full, gentlemen. We'll celebrate when we reach the railroad."

They reached the railroad that night, and astounded the citizens of the town by going through the principal streets. They thought an engine and car had gotten off the track and was running around promiscuously.

The uncle took the whole crowd to the hotel and ordered a magnificent breakfast to be served for the party the next morning at his expense.

Jack, Frank and Pomp slept in the Wonder, determined to give the desperadoes no chance to get possession of it.

All hands were up with the sun, and ready for breakfast.

Several hundred men crowded around the Wonder to gaze at it. But Jack and Frank were cautious about allowing people to enter it, as they were not disposed to give the secret away to everybody.

It was announced that the Wonder would leave there on the third day for Valley Town, with passengers, beating the regular mail-stage by four days.

In two hours there was a score of applications for passage, and Jack told them that they could carry only ten at a time.

In the meantime Frank telegraphed to his father that the Wonder would reach Readestown that night.

Then they started, and pushed in a due easterly direction. The dead, level country made the trip a pleasant and easy one.

The red-shirts of Readestown made up their minds to give them a reception on their arrival.

They mustered some three hundred strong, and had every arrangement made by sunset.

When the whistle of the Wonder was heard out on the prairie they assembled and gave three times three rousing cheers for the Wonder and her young inventor. They then formed in a procession and marched down through the village, bearing torches, halting in front of Frank Reade, Sr.'s house.

The five girls had remained up out of bed to welcome their gallant young rescuers. They were neatly dressed and looked pretty and sweet enough to kiss, as they stood on the piazza and waved a welcome to the Wonder.

Frank was called on for a speech, and his ap-

pearance was the cause of another enthusiastic outburst of cheers.

"We have had a successful cruise," he said, talking to the crowd. "We rescued the regular mail-stage from a band of outlaws, and carried the mails and passengers through to Valley Town. Had two fights with Indians who didn't know what they were bucking against. We had a fight with a bull-buffalo, too, who took Pomp on his back and ran five or six miles with him. We had to do some fine work to get him back again."

That put the laugh on Pomp, and caused the crowd to go for him.

"Why didn't you butt him, Pomp?"

Pomp grinned.

"Dis yer chile knows who to butt," he said, at which there was another roar of laughter. He was a great favorite with the red-shirts of Readestown ever since his auction sale of the barrel of whisky.

"Now, you girls up there on the piazza," cried Frank, looking up at the piazza, which was crowded with ladies, "we have a surprise for two of you. We have not brought husbands for any of you, but we have found the uncle of Susie and Sarah Jones," and he brought Duncan Kenward forward.

"Oh, Uncle Duncan!" screamed both the girls, springing forward and rushing through the crowd, clasping him round the neck and weeping for joy.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MEETING OF UNCLE AND NIECES—FRANK CHECKMATES A GANG OF DESPERADOES.

"Blow me, if that don't make a baby of me!" exclaimed Bill Perkins, the red-shirt hero of the town, wiping his eyes with the sleeve of his red shirt, as the sobs of the two girls were heard.

There was scarcely a dry eye in the crowd. Rough as they were, they were tender-hearted fellows.

"Whoop! Hooray for the Steam Wonder of the plains!" cried one of the men, and the cheers burst forth like a thunder-bolt.

"Come down to the saloon, boys," said Perkins, "and we'll take something to take this brine outen your eyes."

Cheers for Perkins followed, and then the crowd moved away down to the saloon, where the drinks were set up for the whole party.

Frank and Jack locked up the Wonder, and spent the rest of the night in the house with the family.

Duncan Kenward told the story of his adventures since leaving his home in the East years before—how he went West poor and seedy, and was now rich—worth a cool half million dollars, which he would share with his dead sister's two children. He was told of the farm the girls had bought in the outskirts of Readestown.

"I'll buy 'em all a farm each," he said, "and stock it for 'em. They be as independent as girls ought to be, so they won't marry to have some fellow take care of them."

"Why, bless your soul, sir!" exclaimed Frank Reade, Sr., "two of 'em are engaged now, and I am suspicious of Susie and a young fellow down in the village."

"Eh, Susie, girl!" said the uncle, looking hard at the blushing Susie. "Don't be ashamed of it. If he is the right kind of a chap for you I'll set you up all right."

Susie made no reply.

"Oh, well, we'll see about it. Time enough yet, only don't pick up a man who'll spend your money, and abuse you and your children."

They all laughed, and the party broke up, for it was long after midnight.

The next morning, there was a merry, happy party at the breakfast-table of the Reade family. Frank Reade, Sr., was delighted when Frank Reade, Jr., paid him one thousand dollars down on the amount he had advanced toward the construction of the Wonder.

"I'll pay for it in a month, father," said Frank.

"If you do, I'll make you a handsome present, my boy," said the happy father.

"All right. I'll hold you to that, father," he replied.

Duncan Kenward bought a fine farm each for the five girls, gave orders for houses to be built, and for stock to run them. Said they could all live with him till they married off. They were a happy set that day.

The next morning Frank and the Wonder were off again for the town on the railroad, where they were to get a load of passengers for Valley Town. He had laid in a double quantity of oil and everything he could possibly need on the trip.

They reached the town and announced that they would leave next day.

The number of applications had doubled. There were over forty men who wanted to go.

"Gentlemen," he said, "only ten can go at a time. You must throw dice for chances."

The proposition was eagerly accepted, and half the evening was spent raffling for seats.

Every man who won was required to pay down his money on the spot and take a receipt. They were closely scrutinized, too, so their faces would be known in the morning.

Jack and Frank had become suspicious. They suspected that a gang of desperadoes would try to get passage for the purpose of capturing the Wonder when out on the plains. The dice-throwing had upset such calculations—if any had been made. In less than an hour after the raffle men were offering \$50 premium for seats in the Wonder.

"Jack," whispered Frank to his cousin, "we must not let any man go who did not draw his seat in the raffle. I don't like the looks of those fellows who are trying to buy seats."

"It's a gang as sure as you live," said Jack, watching the movements of the party.

"We'll have trouble in the morning. Every man who drew seats is selling out for double. I'll get some red-shirts to stand by us to prevent a row."

Frank found out two or three professional bullies who were "on the shoot," and engaged them to be on hand the next day and take a hand in any scrimmage that might occur. Of course they agreed to do so. Nothing would please them better. They found out that those who had bought out the winners of seats were men of bad reputations.

The next morning the three bullies and their friends were on hand to see the Wonder off.

Everything being in readiness, Frank stationed himself at the door of the car and called out:

"Those who won seats in this car last night will please come aboard, as we will start in a half hour."

The first man to present himself was a big red-shirted fellow, with an ugly scar across his cheek.

"Hold on, my friend," said Frank. "You didn't draw a seat last night."

"The thunder I didn't?" and the man drew the receipt Frank had given to the man who did draw it. "There's the receipt for \$100 paid you."

"So it is, but that was given to Mr. Dougherty—not you. Only Mr. Dougherty can travel on that receipt. I didn't agree to carry you, did I?"

The man was thunderstruck.

"I bought his seat from him," he said.

"That may be—but you must remember that if I agreed to carry Mr. Dougherty to Valley Town I am not bound to carry any one else in his place. I don't propose to let Mr. Dougherty make \$50 or \$100 off of me that way. Mr. Dougherty can go on that receipt, and no one else."

"See hyer, youngster!" cried another man with a receipt in his hand. "That game won't do. We've paid for this ere thing an' we're gwine to see it through."

"You have a receipt, too, have you?" Frank asked.

"Yes—bought and paid \$150 for it," replied the man.

"Who sold it to you?"

"Peter Cronan."

"Well, you must see Cronan about it. I never sold you anything. I don't know you at all."

"Blow my eyes!" growled the man, "you'll know me soon enough if you come such a shenanigan game as this over me."

"Oh, keep your shirt on, my friend," said Frank. "We are able to run this thing ourselves. Jack, call over the names of the men we agreed to carry through to Valley Town."

Jack did so.

"Now come aboard you who paid me for passage, or you'll be left."

"I thought I had the right to sell my seat," said Peter Cronan.

"No, sir. I simply agreed to carry you," was the reply.

"That's fair talk," said one of the bullies, "and the galoot what says it ain't calls me a liar."

"That's so," chorused the other two bullies, and such was their reputation in the place that no one dared to dispute with them.

"You who are entitled to go can have one hour in which to get ready. At the end of that time the Wonder will start, whether you go or not."

"How about my money?" demanded one of the roughs, holding up his receipt.

"Who did you pay your money to?"

"Tom Mulligan."

"Then call Tom Mulligan. That isn't my name."

Curses loud and deep were heard on all sides, but Frank remained firm. The ten original men were forced to refund the money they received and go themselves.

The Wonder then moved away, amid the cheers of the crowd.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE OUTLAW'S SPECTER AGAIN.

On the way out Frank explained to his passengers that he had reason to believe that a gang of desperadoes were trying to get passage on the Wonder for the purpose of capturing it on the plains.

The raffle broke up their game, and they tried to buy seats so as to get the gang together.

"By the great horned frog!" exclaimed one of the passengers, "I thought it strange you would not let a passenger sell his seat. Your excuse is a reasonable one."

"But why couldn't they win seats as well as the rest of us?" one man asked.

"Oh, they could; but it was not likely that the gang could go in and win seats for themselves. Six or eight men had to take their chances with forty, you know."

"Yes; but how do you know that two or three of them didn't win?"

"The fact that every one sold out proves to me that not one of them won. Had one of the gang won he would have kept his receipt."

"That's so; good reasoning, young man. That makes me feel better," and there was general confidence at once established among the passengers.

Nothing of interest occurred on the first day out. Several stations were passed. The agents of the stage contractors said that were it not that the Wonder cleaned out the Indians and outlaws on the route they would kick against its carrying passengers, as it interfered with the business.

"Not a bit of it," replied Jack Russell. "The stages can't carry a fourth of the passengers. We don't interfere in the least."

"But it will interfere and eventually break up the stage business," said the agent.

"Never, because the Wonder cannot run when there is snow on the ground."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"I didn't know that."

"There are many things you don't know yet," remarked Jack, smilingly.

The Wonder moved on, and passed another station about sunset. After a stop of ten minutes it moved off.

Everything was in good order, and as the stars came out the head-light guided the way beautifully. The stars gave a light that enabled them to see objects the size of a man a hundred yards off. The moon would not rise till ten o'clock or after.

"It will be up by the time we reach the river," said Jack, who was acting as engineer.

They reached the river just before midnight. The moon was rising out of the plains like a great ball of silvery fire, shedding a flood of pale light over the illimitable prairie.

Frank took charge and guided the Wonder over the hard sand-bed of the river. The water was some six inches higher than when they crossed it last—the result of the heavy rain-storm four or five days previous.

On the other side they stopped and refilled the casks and tanks with water, and then resumed the journey.

About a mile from the river one of the passengers looked out of the rear windows and exclaimed:

"Hello! There's a fellow following us, running like a race-horse!"

"The deuce!" cried half a dozen at once, crowding forward to get a look at the sight.

"De Lord sabe us!" groaned Pomp, growing utterly demoralized.

"Who in thunder is it?" cried one of the party.

"Why don't you stop and see what he wants?"

"Look at him carefully," said Frank. "Don't you see that we have got him tied by the neck to the car?"

"Good Lord, yes! What does it mean?"

"It means that you are looking at the ghost of a man we dragged to death just that way right along here, less than a month ago."

Every passenger turned pale.

Frank then told the story over again, and then said:

"He will follow us this way till we reach the spot where he fell and gave up the struggle. Then he will give a shriek and fall to the ground. When we return this way he will hitch on again, and follow us to the river."

"What in thunder do you travel this way for?" demanded an excited passenger.

"Because this is the only route to the ford. That is the only place where we can cross."

"It's no fun to be chased ten miles or more by the ghost of a dead outlaw," remarked the passenger.

"I would rather be chased by a dead one than a real live one," said Jack. "These specters never hurt anybody. They merely disturb the nerves of weak people. That's all."

"I was never considered a weak man, and yet that thing out there makes me feel very uncomfortable."

"Of course. That's because it's the only real ghost you have ever seen. You have always believed that ghosts were something all mankind was in honor bound to be afraid of."

"I believe you are right, young man," and the passenger again glanced out at the specter of the outlaw.

"He will follow us about a mile further," said Jack, "and then you'll see him make a desperate effort to free himself, fall to the ground, roll over and over, drag about half a mile, and then the rope will part where Pomp cut it. That's the way he follows us."

"Does he fall when you go the other way—to ward the river?"

"No. He leaves us and dodges into the woods when we reach the river, to wait until we come back again."

"Well, I'll be hanged if I would not get some other route."

"I don't know that that would get rid of him if we did."

"Maybe not, but I'd try it."

"Oh, he doesn't scare me worth a cent," said Frank, laughing. "I'd drag a dozen of them the same way if they played me the same game."

"Of course, and—"

"There!" cried one of the passengers. "He's down! See how he rolls over!"

The passengers crowded forward to get a glimpse of the specter again. They saw him rolling over and over as the rope dragged him over the grass, till finally the rope parted and he was quickly left behind and out of sight.

"Thank God, he's gone!" gasped three or four of the passengers at once.

"Good riddance," cried others.

"De Lord sabe us!" exclaimed Pomp, with a great sigh of relief.

"I don't mind him at all," said Jack. "We've proved to him that we can hang such as he without any trouble."

"I wouldn't travel this way again," said another passenger, "for a thousand dollars. Why, the car is haunted!"

"No, not the car, but the place of his execution," said the young inventor. "He leaves us as soon as we pass the spot where we cut him loose."

"Yes—yes. I don't want to come this way any more. I'll never forget that fellow's looks as long as I live."

Jack and Frank laughed and enjoyed the fright of the passengers, and told many ghost stories to while away the balance of the night, as the specter had driven sleep from the eyes of most of them.

The next station was reached in a little over an hour after they got rid of the ghost of the dead outlaw. Only ten minutes were allowed the passengers to refresh themselves, and then the journey was resumed.

They reached Valley Town on the third day, and met with a rousing reception from everybody. The red-shirts were particularly demonstrative, and wanted to shake hands with the young inventor.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DESTROYING A COMANCHE VILLAGE.

The next day after the Wonder reached Valley Town three men came in from below. Two were wounded—one quite seriously. The one not hurt was a very wealthy stock-owner, whose place had been attacked and burned, and his wife and daughter carried away by the Comanche Indians.

The moment he entered the Grub House, he called out:

"I will give one thousand dollars to any man who will ride to Santa Fe for a company of United States troops!"

Santa Fe was three hundred miles away, yet a dozen men sprang up to accept his offer.

"What's the trouble, stranger?" one of the crowd asked.

"The Comanches have burnt my ranch and carried off my wife and daughter and many of my best horses," he said.

Frank heard him.

"Do you know where they have carried them, sir?" he asked, stepping up to the stranger.

"I think I do; to one of the villages about one hundred and fifty miles from here. Oh, God! what will my poor darlings not suffer? I'd give \$10,000 in gold to save them from—"

"My friend," said Frank, "I think I can save them within two days."

The man grasped his hand, and looked hard at him for several moments.

"How can you?" he huskily asked.

"Oh, he can do it, stranger," exclaimed a red-shirt in the crowd.

"Then I'll give you \$10,000 if you will."

"I don't want your money—"

"You shall have it!" interrupted the man. "I am rich. I'll give all I'm worth to get them out of the hands of those demons."

"Do you know the country down there well enough to guide me?"

"Every inch of it."

"Then we can be off in a half hour," said Frank. "I want five good fighters to go with us."

Twenty red-shirt volunteers to go, but Frank let the barkeeper of the Grub House select the men to go with him.

"I have six repeating-rifles on board," said the young inventor; "you can bring your revolvers with you."

The anxious father was bewildered. He knew not what to think. He had never heard of the Steam Wonder. He followed Frank and the five men out to the car.

The whole thing flashed over him in a moment. He grasped the young inventor's hand, and said:

"Young man, your fortune is made if you give me my wife and daughter alive."

"Enough said, sir. Get in, Pomp, fire up and get ready for a run. Now, sir, you must tell me how I can reach the Indian villages without having to cross any streams. Can you do so?"

The man hung his head in deep thought a few moments.

"Yes," he replied, "but you'll have to go at least fifty miles out of the way to do so."

"That is only a matter of some three hours," said Jack.

"Three hours?"

"Yes, sir. On a good prairie, we can run twenty miles an hour."

"Thank God!" he ejaculated.

In less than the half hour they were ready to start, and the Wonder moved out of the town, followed by the cheers and good-will of everybody.

Mr. Gregory, for that was the rich ranchman's name, guided Frank as to the right direction to take, and the Wonder sped along at full speed.

In the meantime Jack instructed the men as to the style of fighting inside the car.

They were apt scholars, and soon mastered it.

Night came on, and the speed was reduced to ten miles an hour, the head-light guiding them safely.

They traveled all night, and daylight found them some twenty miles out of the way. Gregory soon gave the right direction, and in three hours they came in sight of the Indian village.

Many ponies about the village indicated that the braves were at home.

"By my soul!" exclaimed Gregory, "I recognize several of my horses! There's my favorite saddle-horse and my own saddle on him. And there's my daughter's horse—one of the fleetest in the country!"

The Wonder was almost in the village before it was discovered.

The alarm was given, and fully a hundred braves rushed out to meet it. Frank stopped right on the edge of the village. The braves, believing a new prize had come into their hands, whooped and yelled like the demons they were.

"Where's your chief?" Frank demanded of one who seemed to be a leader among them.

"Me chief. Me Prairie Wolf," replied the savage.

"That's the chief!" whispered Gregory to Frank.

"Well, Prairie Wolf, come in here; I want to see you;" and Frank opened the door at the end of the car for the chief. The bold rascal came in, expecting to be followed by several others. The door was closed quickly and two revolvers pressed against his breast.

"Prairie Wolf!" hissed Gregory, "do you know me?"

"Ugh! yes—me know," replied the chief.

"Where is my family?"

"Me got 'um."

"Well, I've got you—do you understand that?"

Confident in his ability to face the little handful of whites in the car with his hundred braves outside, the chief gave a war-whoop. Instantly he was seized, disarmed, bound, and gagged.

Those outside yelled in response to his whoop, and commenced a furious attack on the car. Then the repeating-rifles commenced their deadly work.

Crack! crack! crack! they went, and the death-rate ran higher among the red-skins.

Twenty minutes passed, and the Comanches found that over one-half their number were down, and yet they had not seen a white-face since Prairie Wolf entered the car.

They retreated.

The Wonder pursued and shot them down like rabbits.

They sprang on their horses and fled, but even that didn't save them. At last they scattered and went in every direction.

"Back to the village!" cried Gregory.

The Wonder steamed up to the village again. Not a warrior was left there. The women were frightened almost to death.

Opening the door Gregory sprang out, followed by the five red-shirts who had come with them, and commenced a search among the lodges for his family. He found them in Prairie Wolf's lodge, kept hidden under an immense buffalo-robe by two old hags.

"Oh, papa, papa!" cried the daughter, on hearing his voice.

The hags tried to keep her down, but the red-shirts tore them aside, and restored husband, wife, and daughter to each other.

"Thank God!" cried Gregory, pressing them to his heart. "Come to the car, darlings," and he led them to the Wonder and put them in, saying to Frank and Jack:

"There they are—safe as ever, Mr. Reade. I'm going to burn up this village, and Prairie Wolf with it."

"Do as you please, Mr. Gregory," said Frank. "I won't interfere in the matter. I am glad to see you restored to your husband, Mrs. Gregory."

"Oh, it's you we are indebted to for this!" cried Mrs. Gregory. "May Heaven bless you, Mr. Reade!"

"Thank you, madam," and Frank bowed to the mother and daughter, and turned away to see what Gregory and the red-shirts were doing.

They had started the fire, and soon several lodges were in a blaze. The squaws made a great outcry, but they were mercilessly knocked over whenever they got in the way.

"Now, you fiend!" cried Gregory, rushing into the car, and seizing Prairie Wolf, "I'll settle with you for all the past."

He dragged him out of the car and threw him into the burning lodge he had recently occupied. In a moment the fiend was suffocated and writhing in death agonies.

"You will never raid another ranch!" cried Gregory, as he watched the flames do their work.

While the village was burning a score of warriors sat on their horses out in the prairie looking on, not daring to go any nearer. The Steam Wonder was too much for them. Their bullets fell harmless. They knew not what to do.

When the village was destroyed the whites re-entered the Wonder, and moved away. They pursued the warriors, and shot them down as fast as they could be seen.

"The Government ought to buy this Steam Wonder for the protection of the plains," said Mr. Gregory.

"So I think," said one of the red-shirts.

"I'll give you one hundred per cent. on the cost of it, Mr. Reade," remarked the wealthy stock-raiser.

"When I feel disposed to part with it, I'll consider the offer, Mr. Gregory," replied Frank.

"That gives me the refusal of it, does it not?"

"Yes."

"That settles it," and they shook hands over the understanding.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

ALICE GREGORY, the daughter of the rich stock-raiser, was one of the prettiest as well as the most interesting girls Frank had ever seen. She was dark—intensely brunette—owing to having spent all her life, except when at school, in the open air of the prairie. Her eyes were like ebony diamonds, large and lustrous, and her hair like the raven's wing.

Frank lost no time in making her acquaintance. She seemed to be as much pleased with him as he was with her. They sat by each other during the whole day, Jack running the engine.

She made him tell her the history of the Steam Wonder and his adventures with it.

It seemed like a tale of romance to her, and she regarded him as the most remarkable young man she had ever heard of. They were about the same age—not quite eighteen—and their youth and temperaments caused a deep sympathy to spring up between them.

Night came on, and still the Wonder pushed on over the plains. Alice Gregory leaned her head on Frank's shoulder and slept. Frank enjoyed the situation immensely.

At daylight they reached Valley Town, and the story of the rescue of the ladies and the destruction of the Indian village spread like wildfire. The red-shirts turned out *en masse*, and greeted the young inventor of the Steam Wonder in royal style.

A meeting was called, and resolutions passed, requesting Frank Reade, Jr., to build a Steam Wonder for the town of Valley Town, to be used for the protection of that part of the country from the Comanches. A committee was appointed to wait on Frank and get his answer.

"The gold is on hand to pay for it, pard," said the chairman of the committee, when they called on Frank.

"I will try to do as you desire," said Frank, "as the people of Valley Town have been kind to us."

"Thank you, pard. We'll make the red-skins howl when we get it. We'll call it the 'Frank Reade,' and stand by her till the earth crumbles away."

Then the whole town took drinks, and made a holiday of it. Mr. Gregory gave Frank a draft on St. Louis for \$10,000, and told him he would take another Wonder, too, if he would make one for him.

Two days more were spent at Valley Town, during which time Frank was constantly with the young lady he had rescued from the Comanches. The truth is, he was deeply in love with the dashing beauty, and she with him. He promised to run the Wonder down to her father's ranch in the fall and spend a week there.

"I'll bring my sister with me," he said, "and you can go back with her and stay a month or two."

"Yes," said she. "I would be delighted to do so. Bring her, by all means."

They parted, and the Wonder speeded on its way back with ten passengers, followed by the cheers and good wishes of everybody in Valley Town.

The return trip was not exciting beyond the appearance of the ghost of the dead outlaw, which followed them to the river, as it had done before.

Frank and Jack had gotten used to the specter, but Pomp was terribly demoralized every time it appeared, and would not look at it. Some of the passengers were just as badly broken up as Pomp was about it.

The specter left them at the river, however, and then it was pleasant sailing the rest of the way. They indulged in a buffalo chase, but did not see any Indians. The fact was, the red-skins had heard that a strange kind of wagon was out on the prairie, playing the old Harry with them, so they kept off, a long way off, lest they should meet it. The Steam Wonder had grown to be a terror to the red-men of the West.

After delivering his passengers, Frank concluded to run down to Readestown and pay his father all the money he had advanced for the construction of the Wonder.

Accordingly he remained only one hour at the place, saying he would return soon and carry another load of passengers through to Valley Town and Santa Fe, and then set out for home.

A glad welcome awaited them at Readestown. The five young ladies he had rescued from the Apaches gave them kisses, and everybody else took their hands.

Julia Morgan, it was plain to everybody, was madly in love with Frank, and when Jack told them all how badly mashed Frank was on Alice Gregory, she almost fainted.

Frank Reade, Sr., was astonished at the financial success of the Steam Wonder. He said it beat anything he had done in the palmy days of the Steam Team or the Tally Ho.

"I think I ought to improve on your inventions, father," replied Frank, laughing, "as I had the benefit of them to start on. I've got something in my head that'll work out some day and lay everything else in the shade."

"What is it?"

"Oh, I don't exactly know myself, but look out for it—it's a-coming," and they both laughed heartily.

And now, reader, we will leave the brilliant young inventor with his Steam Wonder, career-ing over the illimitable plains, making a thousand dollars a trip, running down to the ranch of the rich stock-raiser to bask in the smiles of the beautiful Alice, and spreading terror among the Indians and outlaws, till some other time, when his wonderful inventive genius shall call for a pen to record his triumphs and adventures.

[THE END.]

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